

AN ISLAND SECRET



EARLE C. McALLISTER



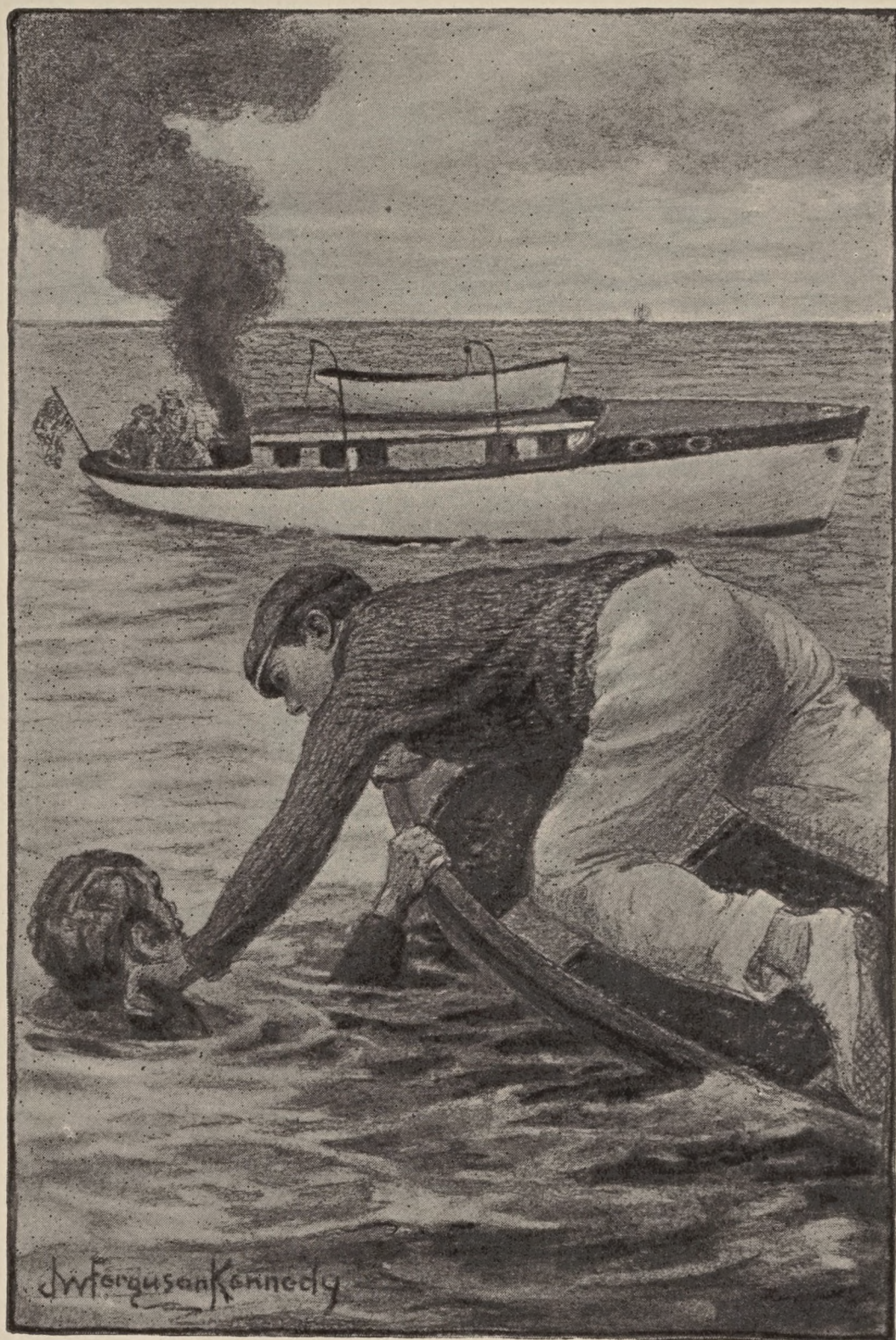
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AN
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SECRET



"VAL . . . CAUGHT THE SWIMMER BY THE COLLAR."

AN
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SECRET

BY
EARLE C. McALLISTER

Author of "On Tower Island"

Illustrated by
J. W. FERGUSON KENNEDY



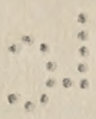
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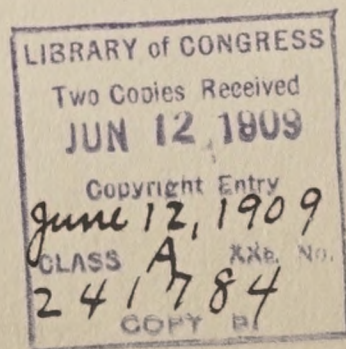
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AN ISLAND SECRET



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Introduction

LAST spring when the author chanced to be in Stroudport, down in the Pine Tree State, he called at the State Agency of the Liberty Mutual Life Insurance Company, and by good luck found Val Brandon at his desk.

“Val,” said I, after we had exchanged greetings, “you told me about your experiences on Tower Island; how Major Bangs and his gang carried off you and Cal and Sumner; and how you outwitted them and prevented them from carrying out their scheme to cheat the life insurance companies out of half a million.

“In fact,” I ran on, while Val favored me with a keen glance, “you may be aware that those adventures have been immortalized in a book called ‘On Tower Island.’”

“I am very much aware of it,” was the laughing reply. “The notoriety of that affair was inconvenient at the first, but after your book appeared it was positively painful. And the letters I got!”

“ Letters? ”

“ By the peck. Some of them wanted to know if it really and truly happened. About a dozen wanted to borrow the ‘ Spitfire ’ and go on a cruise. A lot said they couldn’t find Tower Island anywhere on the map, and believed the whole business was a fake.”

“ Did you bother to answer any of them? ”

“ Why, certainly. I picked out all the different questions and wrote up a set of answers, had them printed on a duplicator, and sent out to every one. It read something like this:

“ ‘ The author of “ On Tower Island ” stuck to the facts as well as he could. Of course it happened just as sure as I’m living.

“ ‘ No, I have nothing to lend; I need the “ Spitfire ” in my business.

“ ‘ If you look in the right place you will be sure to find Tower Island.’ And so forth, but most of them demanded to know what the two ciphers meant, and what became of the crazy engineer Marshall, and of the deck-hand Fenderson, both of whom I had last seen on Whale Island.”

“ And what could you say to that? ” I inquired.

“ I told them you were going to write another book, and if they were good waiters they would get the rest of the story sometime. Was I right? ”

“ You were just right,” I exclaimed, enthusiastically; “ and now won’t you tell me all about what happened next? ”

Val Brandon's features relaxed into a reminiscent smile.

"Well, you see, it was this way," he began; and as he had a little time on his hands he spun me the yarn I was anxious to hear. Later I renewed my acquaintance with Carroll Morse and Sumner Parker, and they filled in several details. As some of you who read "On Tower Island" have asked for more about these friends of mine, I have written out the story of "An Island Secret;" and in it you will find out all about the two mysterious ciphers, and the adventures in which the boys were involved on account of them.

EARLE CABOT McALLISTER.

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

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An Island Secret

CHAPTER I

CONCERNING CIPHERS

“SEEING is believing, Cal Morse. You always did like to tell me fairy tales,” remarked Sumner Parker incredulously. “If you can get over to the ‘Hercules’ on the hawser, I’ll buy you seven great big sodas just as soon as we get ashore. Come now!”

Sumner Parker and Carroll Morse were lounging on the after-deck of the ocean-going tug “Storm King,” which, towing four coal barges from Philadelphia, was running in from sea to make Stroudport harbor. Captain Bucklin, the owner of this and several other boats like her, usually made at least one trip on each of his tugs every year; and when the “Storm King” started south this time she carried not only her owner but these two young friends of his. Sumner was a bright, good-natured, roly-poly chunk of a high-school boy,

seventeen years old; while Carroll, a tall, well-built and muscular fellow, was somewhat older, and now enjoying his second summer vacation from mental toil at Brunswick College.

They had enjoyed every minute of the trip, and now it was almost ended. They had made friends of the tug captain, the mates, and everyone else from the chief-engineer down to the cook — and he was last but not least, for he told them hair-raising tales of being wrecked up in the Arctic Circle in winter. Their favorite lounging place was the after-deck, where they carried chairs, and, seating themselves near the bitts to which was attached the tow-line that connected the tug with the nearest barge, the “Hercules,” lazily watched the big hawser flick the tops of the waves; and it was interesting to see — when there was any sea running — the showers of spray that were thrown up by the blunt bows of the “Hercules,” the “Ajax,” the “Pocahontas,” and the “Hopatcong,” as, strung out in a line behind the “Storm King,” they were dragged unwillingly toward their destination.

“Seven big sodas that you can’t go hand over hand on the hawser to the ‘Hercules,’” reiterated Sumner, with a laugh that was meant to be tantalizing. “Seven—count ’em. One lemon, one vanilla, one strawberry, one raspberry, one chocolate, one —”

“I can do it,” interrupted Carroll, intentionally

raising his voice as he caught the sound of Captain Bucklin's footsteps coming toward them; and throwing off his jacket — for thirty miles out at sea it was cool, though it was a July afternoon — he began to unlace his shoes with a great show of earnestness. "Not that I care a snap for sodas," he explained, carelessly, as he tugged at the shoe-strings; "but I don't back down for any fat kid from the Stroudport High School."

"Look here, boys," broke in the bluff voice of the Captain as he rounded the corner at that moment, holding a paper in his hand. "Whose hen-tracks are these?"

"What hen-tracks?" Carroll asked, pausing in his disrobing; but the tug owner saw the shoes lying on the deck, and his attention was diverted for the time being.

"What are you up to now?" he inquired.

"Sum doesn't believe I can get over to the 'Hercules' on the hawser, and I know I can, so I'm going to show him," explained Carroll. Sumner said nothing, for he caught sight of the paper and his face reddened.

The Captain uttered an exclamation of protest.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," he declared. "If I catch you getting on that line there'll be trouble right off!"

"But you don't really care, do you?" asked Carroll, opening his eyes in well-simulated astonishment.

"You don't imagine for an instant that I want you to get drowned now that I've got you almost back home?" demanded Captain Bucklin, quite severely.

"Oh, well, if I had known you would feel that way, I'd never have thought of doing it," said Carroll, politely, as he began to resume his clothing; but his eyes twinkled, for he had expected this outcome to the affair, and really had no idea of undertaking such a foolhardy exploit.

"Now that you have been saved from a watery grave, tell me if you know anything about this paper," the Captain proceeded, turning the document around so that the boys could view its contents.

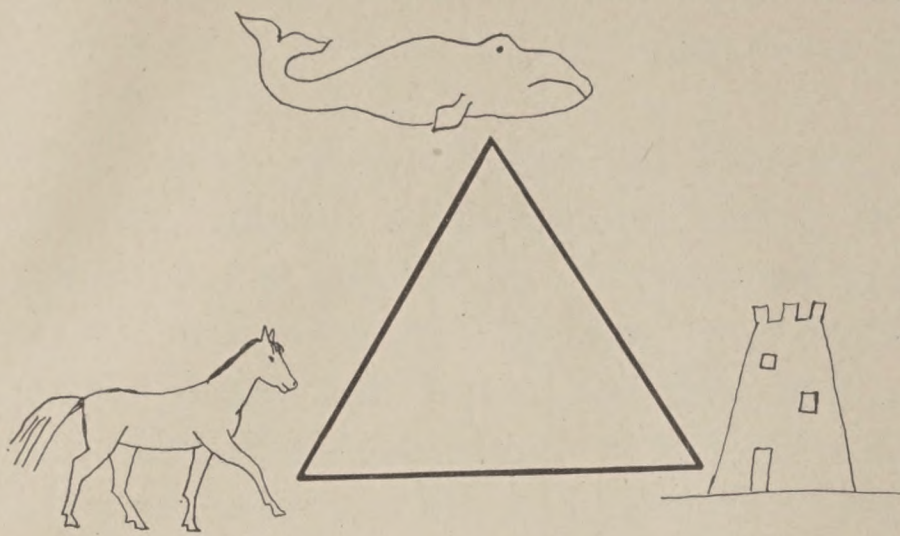
"Where'd *you* get it?" asked Carroll, in wonder, for he recognized it at once, although it was not his property, but Sumner's.

"Cook found it on the galley floor just after you fellows had been browsing around for pie. He said it wasn't his — guessed it must belong to one of you. What is it?"

Sumner's face assumed a worried expression, and he hastily fumbled in the inside of his jacket.

"Yes, sir," he asserted, "there's a hole in that pocket. You see, Captain," he went on, "the cook was telling us about the time he was wrecked up in Alaska when the snow was eighteen feet deep, and —"

"And I suppose that explains why the paper



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CIPHER FOUND ON TOWER ISLAND.

slipped through the hole," the Captain interjected, with mild sarcasm. "If all the yarns that cook tells were true, he'd have lived more lives than a cat. But, what is it?"

"It's a copy of the cipher Val Brandon found on Tower Island," said Sumner, seeing that an explanation was inevitable. "'Twas last summer, when our cruise on the 'Spitfire' was broken up by Major Bangs and Jones, and they had carried Val and Cal off to the island on the 'Sea Rover.'

"It's probably the key to hidden treasure," the boy continued, beginning to get enthusiastic, "and I'll bet there's thousands of dollars in it if we can only find the clew!"

"I ought to know something about Tower Island," exclaimed the Captain, "but this is the first I've heard of any cipher being found there, and you've had it a whole year and never yipped about it to me," and he gazed at the boys quite reproachfully.

Then turning his attention to the paper he examined it closely, and it was, to say the least, a curious document. It was as large as a sheet of foolscap — Sumner had made a full-sized copy of the original parchment — and at its top was the geometrical figure of a triangle, at whose corners were roughly drawn a tower, a horse, and a fish, respectively — at least, these were the names the boys gave to the objects. The tower was at the lower right hand, the horse at the lower left hand

and the fish at the top, or vertex, of the triangle.

Below the triangle and its accompanying pictures were a number of lines of most unusual characters, unlike the letters of any alphabet they had ever seen or heard of. Each one of these was made up of a vertical line from which shorter lines branched out horizontally to right or left, and occasionally from these short marks, or arms, still shorter marks branched up or down.

"We never have been able to find out what it means," explained Carroll, "and we haven't told anyone about it except Jim Hilton and our own fathers and mothers."

"You see, Jim had a sort of interest in it," broke in Sumner, "for he and Professor Strodder and I found another cipher that looked almost exactly like this one —"

"What! You found another cipher? Whereabouts was it?" the Captain asked helplessly.

"Down on Stone Horse Island, near Codville. Don't you know that place?"

"Rather think I do," remarked the Captain, for it was his relief party on the "Storm King" the summer before that had rescued Jim Hilton and the Professor from the island mentioned, and afterwards arrested Jones and released Sumner from his clutches while on Val Brandon's sloop-yacht "Spitfire." "But where is the other cipher?"

" Jones took it away from me," said Sumner, mournfully. " You see, it was just this way," he continued, while the Captain sat down on the rail and regarded him expectantly. " When Jones stole the ' Spitfire ' with me on board we were blown out to sea, and then driven ashore on an island near Codville.

" I ran away from Jones and rowed over to Cod Island, where Jim Hilton and the Professor found me on the beach; they took me to Padgett's, and I stayed there a couple of days."

The Captain nodded, for he was familiar with this part of the narrative.

" Now Jim was crazy over a dream he'd had about buried treasure," went on Sumner. " He got the Professor and me to go over to Stone Horse Island with him one night when the moon was full — "

" What was the dream? " asked the Captain, thoroughly interested in this odd story.

" Why, he dreamed that we took a hen and rowed to the island at midnight; then we let the hen loose and she led the way to the spot where Captain Kidd had buried his treasure. Wasn't that just about the limit? But he'd dreamed this three times and thought it was a sure thing, so one night we borrowed one of Padgett's hens and went over to the island; but we certainly had a fierce time."

" Why — what happened? "

“ Jim shook the hen out of the bag, and the Professor almost fell down on her, and that scared her so we lost her. Then the boat went adrift, and we had to stay on the island all night; and I tell you it was some chilly till we got a driftwood fire going in the lee of that big rock they call the stone horse.”

“ I calculate it was,” agreed the Captain; “ but go on. I don’t see any cipher in sight yet.”

“ You will in a minute,” said Sumner. “ After a while we went to sleep around the fire; but early in the morning that pesky hen began to cackle and woke us all up. She’d laid an egg.

“ Then the Professor said he had just dreamed that we dug where the egg was laid and found the treasure; so we dug down a ways, and, sure enough, we found a wooden keg. Inside of that was a sealed copper tube; and inside of the tube was the cipher.”

“ Well, I’ll be blessed,” cried the Captain in astonishment. “ But how did Jones get it away from you all? ”

“ Oh, he had a revolver. You see, the ‘ Spit-fire ’ floated all right on the first high tide, and ever since Jones had been hanging ’round in her trying to nab me. He came ashore and surprised us while we were looking at the cipher.”

“ And took it away from you? ”

“ Yes, and made me go back with him on the yacht.”

"I know — I know — but I wonder what he ever did with that document," the Captain said, musingly.

"He wouldn't tell me," said Sumner.

"Wouldn't tell you?" repeated the Captain, in some surprise. "When did you have a chance to ask him?"

"Last August when he was in jail waiting for his trial to come off Jim and I went there and asked him where the cipher was."

"What did he say?"

"I asked him to please tell us what he did with that paper, and he said: 'I'll see you hanged first, you young puppy. You've made trouble enough for me. Get out and leave me alone.'"

"'Twasn't any use," sighed Sumner. "He wouldn't tell me."

"I believe he tore it up and threw it away," Carroll declared.

"He didn't do it while I was around, for I would have been pretty sure to see him," objected Sumner, stoutly. "Besides, he had no reason to destroy it."

"Now you look here," the Captain suddenly remarked. "When we arrested Jones and took him aboard the tug he was searched for hidden weapons, but we didn't find any cipher on him."

It was apparent that the tug owner's ideas about the matter were focusing on some definite point. His auditors listened very closely as he proceeded.

"Now if Jones had the cipher when he went aboard the 'Spitfire,' and didn't destroy it, and didn't have it when he left her, where is it now? Why, hidden on board the yacht this minute," asserted the Captain earnestly. "Sometime you fellows give that craft a thorough overhauling, and I'll bet a cookie you'll find the missing paper."

Carroll rose excitedly to his feet.

"You're right, Captain," he cried. "I never thought of it before, but I believe you're right!"

"Of course I'm right," was the instant retort. "Where does Brandon keep his yacht now?"

"Anchored over opposite the Yacht Club," replied Sumner, "and the first thing I'm going to do is to go out and give her a good ransacking."

"To-night?" asked Carroll.

"Yes, I'll go to-night," was the prompt declaration. "Will you go with me?"

"I certainly will. Why, Captain," Carroll continued, pointing at the paper in the old gentleman's hand, "we have done our best to find out what that means, without the slightest success. Val and Sum and I have studied every book on ciphers and cryptograms we could beg or borrow, and Jim Hilton up in Burlington has waded through all kinds of puzzle books. Besides that, we've read up on all the pirates and buccaneers that came to Maine and buried treasure —"

"Golden ingots, and doubloons, and the vast

loot of treasure ships from the Spanish main, eh?" chuckled the Captain, slapping his knee.

"Yes, sir; why not?" Carroll said. "But though we haven't succeeded in getting a clew to this cipher, the other one may be different, and give us an inkling of what they are both about."

"Maybe so," the Captain admitted, as he returned the paper to Sumner. "That's the most curious thing I ever saw, anyhow. I can't make head or tail of it; but I'll be interested to know how you get along."

"We'll be sighting the Two Lights soon, and a couple of hours more ought to find us tied up at Stevens Wharf. Then you can hunt all you want to."

"It'll be seven o'clock by that time, at least," Sumner said, after consulting his watch. "My folks are all down at Orr's Island, and I can't get there to-night, so I'm ready for the search."

"And my people are out of the city and the house is shut up, so I'm homeless, too," Carroll rejoined. "We've just simply got to hunt for that cipher."

"There's no reason why you can't sleep on the tug, if you want to," suggested the Captain; "but I'm going home." And so it was arranged.

Sumner's watch indicated half-past eight o'clock when the "Storm King," having anchored her barges in the roads, tied up for the night at Stevens Wharf in Stroudport. Captain Bucklin

immediately departed for his home across the harbor in South Stroudport; while the boys went ashore for the first time in several days to make the proposed search on the "Spitfire" for the missing Stone Horse Island cipher.

"Val ought to go too," suggested Carroll, "and we'll just call him on the telephone and let him know what's up."

They headed for the nearest pay-station; but it turned out that Val was away from home for the evening.

"He's down to the islands insuring somebody's life," grumbled Carroll, as he hung up the receiver. "I never saw such a fellow for work! But we'd better go ahead just the same, hadn't we?"

"Well, I guess yes!" was his companion's decided answer. "I've got a key to the cabin, and we'll get a rowboat and a lantern at the clubhouse. Come on!"

As the reader may know, Stroudport boasts one of the finest harbors in the State of Maine. The inner harbor, where the wharves are located, is long and quite narrow, and between it and the heaving Atlantic Cape Eastern interposes its protecting bulk. Toward the eastward the harbor opens out into Stroudport Bay with its "three hundred and sixty-five" islands — a summer paradise.

The club-house of the Stroudport Yacht Club — to which organization Val, Carroll and Sumner

belonged — stood on the outer end of a long pier, facing the inner harbor; and as Carroll and Sumner paused, with oars and lantern in hand, at the head of the steps leading down to the landing-floats, and tried to get a glimpse of the “Spitfire” at anchor, they saw very plainly the electric lights directly across the harbor in South Stroudport, half a mile distant. A young moon peeped down through hazy clouds, but its light was insufficient to reveal the yacht, which the janitor assured them was over near the Cape shore.

The light row-boat that served as tender to the sloop was moored to a ringbolt of one of the floats. They took possession of her, and with Sumner at the oars headed out across the harbor. Sumner looked like a pretty fat youth, but a good part of his bulk was sound muscle, and he soon had the boat going at a rapid pace. They were fast approaching the “Spitfire’s” anchorage when Carroll uttered a sudden exclamation.

“Hold on a minute,” he said in a puzzled tone. “Tell me; what’s that queer light on the yacht?”

Sumner stopped rowing and looked around. They were still several hundred feet from the sloop, but near enough to see her dimly. The light to which Carroll referred was not a bright beam, such as a lantern might cast. What they saw was a fitful gleam, flitting about the yacht, illuminating first one part and then another.

"Looks to me like a bull's-eye lantern," said Sumner under his breath. "Say," he gasped, with sudden conviction, "I'll bet it's water thieves!"

"They've got good nerve, I must say, if that's what it is," was his chum's reply. "Row up easy, and we'll take a hand in this business."

"Hadn't we better go back and get help?" queried Sumner dubiously.

"What? Let 'em break in and lug off a lot of stuff while we're hunting 'round for the police? Not much! Are you scared?"

"Well, not exactly scared, you know; but I don't feel as bold as a lion, either," admitted Sumner, as after some hesitation he resumed rowing. "I just feel kind of shivery up and down my spine. They say these water thieves are a mighty tough lot — they'd just as soon knock you on the head as not, and a little rather!"

"Oh, that's all bosh!" was the reassuring reply. "Just hang on to your courage and we'll sneak up on the quiet and see what's going on."

This exhibition of valor was very comforting to Sumner, so, after extinguishing the lighted lantern, he rowed along almost noiselessly, while Carroll steered and kept his eyes on the yacht. As they drew closer he made out a figure in the "Spit-fire's" cock-pit, leaning over the companion-way.

"Somebody's trying to get into the cabin," he

whispered. "There! The light's gone; I guess he got in."

"How many could you see?" Sumner asked with a shiver in his voice. "You know these water thieves travel in gangs, and while one goes in and loots the vessel another stays outside and stands guard."

"I saw only one; but of course there may be another on the watch somewhere. Wonder where their boat is? It must be on the other side — perhaps with someone in it. I think we'd better row around to the other side first."

This plan was adopted. They rowed quietly around the bow of the "Spitfire" and found a rowboat tied to the yacht's port quarter; but it was empty.

"One man is working alone," Sumner commented in a whisper. "See here! I've got a great idea! Let's take his boat and then go for help. That'll nail him, sure."

"And while we're gone he'll discover something is wrong and swim ashore — 't isn't far to the Cape," Carroll objected. "No," he went on, with decision, "I think we'd better go right on board, if we can, and find out what's going on; but we'll unhitch his boat, just the same, and let her drift off. Then if there's a fuss and he comes out on top, we'll get away in ours, and he'll be left on the yacht, which will give us something of an advantage."

It was a simple matter to run in close and sever the painter of the rowboat — a dory — and the tide, now beginning to ebb, started it gently away down the harbor. But when this was accomplished, another difficulty confronted them.

“As soon as we start to climb on board, we’ll tip the yacht, and then the man will come out and find us,” whispered Sumner. “What are we going to do?”

“Don’t you worry about that,” said Carroll, who had been taking a look around. “There’ll be commotion enough in a minute to cover our tracks. Don’t you hear the ferry-boat coming? Well, when her swell reaches us, we’ll climb right on. What have you got on your feet?”

“Tennis shoes.”

“That’s the stuff — rubber soles don’t make any noise. Mine are the same. Now just as soon as the swell begins to rock the yacht, lay low and listen, for the fellow may get alarmed and come out. If he doesn’t, we’ll get aboard and look into the cabin.”

They worked carefully in alongside the yacht, and Sumner pulled in the oars and fastened the painter to a deck-cleat well up toward the bow. So for a few moments they lay, each fending off the boat to prevent its bumping. On board they could hear sounds in the cabin as of someone rummaging here and there, and occasionally a glint of light showed in the side ports, but no one

came out to reconnoitre. When, however, they tried to get a view of the interior through the ports they found it impracticable, for these little windows were in the cabin trunk — that portion that rose above the deck, — and were so small and so far away that it would be necessary to go on board to look through them.

Between Stroudport and South Stroudport the side-wheeled ferry-boat "Governor Robie" made regular trips, and she was coming over to the Cape now, laying a course that would take her within a short distance of the "Spitfire." Her lights were growing momentarily brighter, and the churn of her paddles louder and louder. She always kicked up a tremendous wake, and as she drove past a series of rollers bore down on the yacht and set her to pitching violently.

The instant the "Spitfire" began to toss, Sumner and Carroll ducked low in the tender, for immediately they heard the occupant of the cabin move to the companionway, and felt rather than saw him look for the source of the disturbance. Then a voice muttered, "Only a ferry-boat;" its owner returned to the cabin; and, in a second, lightly as a pair of cats Carroll and Sumner crept on board unnoticed.

Carroll had no weapon but his fists. Sumner, however, scented trouble very strongly, and had armed himself with the boat seat he had so recently occupied. The yacht was still oscillating

from the ferry-boat swell when they stepped noiselessly to the cabin sky-light and looked in. The sight that met their eyes was strange enough.

Save for one brilliant spot of light the interior of the cabin was enveloped in gloom; but against that blackness, and illuminated by a circle of radiance that came from an electric hand-lamp, there stood forth to view a curious-looking sheet of paper, held in a man's left hand. Nothing else was visible except when the man's head was in part silhouetted against the bright circle as he bent forward in scrutiny of the paper.

For a full minute the boys gazed intently at the document showing so clearly beneath them. Then Sumner gripped his companion's arm convulsively.

"Do you see what he's got?" he whispered, hoarsely.

"You bet!" was the answer, also whispered. "It's the stolen cipher. Don't let him get away with it!"

CHAPTER II

THE INTRUDER ON THE "SPITFIRE"

A SMALL circle of light illuminating a man's left wrist and thumb, and with it a sheet of parchment. At the top of this parchment a triangle, at whose corners were rudely drawn three characters: at the centre of the top a figure resembling a fish, at the lower left-hand corner a horse, at the lower right-hand corner a tower. In the body of the sheet numerous lines of odd characters, unlike the letters of any known alphabet, and the whole affair bearing a close resemblance to the document Val Brandon had found on Tower Island, a copy of which at that moment rested in Sumner Parker's pocket.

This was what Carroll and Sumner saw as they started eagerly down into the cabin of the sloop-yacht "Spitfire."

Who the man was, they could not tell. The electric flash-lamp held in his right hand cast no light on his features. But it was apparent that the stranger *knew* what they had only surmised, namely: that the missing cipher had been hidden on the yacht, for he had beaten them out in finding

it. The feeling of surprise that had assailed the boys when they discovered an intruder on the "Spitfire" was intensified greatly by the discovery that he was bent on the same errand as themselves, and had, moreover, been successful in the search.

Sumner bent down and looked closely at the odd characters revealed by the electric lamp. Was this cipher like Val's, or wasn't it? If it was the same, well, it wouldn't be such a terrible matter if the man did run off with it; but if it was another cipher, then the fellow must give it up.

In a moment Sumner stood erect. Carroll could not distinguish his features clearly in the dusk, but he felt rather than saw that his companion was laboring under considerable excitement.

"It's another cipher, Cal!" came the whisper. "It's different from Val's — I'm sure it is! See! The fish is heading the other way from his! The letters don't look the same; and what's more, we've got to have it!"

"You bet!" breathed Carroll, "but who is he? Say, you don't imagine Jones has got loose from State's prison, do you?"

"What, and come here?" was the anxious reply. "Lordy, I hope not! If it's him, he'll skin *me*, all right!" And the bare thought made Sumner turn instinctively toward the rowboat.

Then, somehow, he lost his grip on the boat-seat, and it fell to the deck with a startling clatter.

The light in the cabin instantly went out. For a long moment there was tense silence on the "Spitfire." Then the man in the cabin emerged into the cockpit, coolly turned on his light, and flashed it about the deck.

No sooner had it shown in the faces of the boys than Carroll started aft, while Sumner recovered his weapon and edged gingerly in the same direction. Trouble seemed to loom large on the horizon. Out there in the darkness of Stroudport harbor, all sort of unpleasant things might happen.

"'Tain't Jones," muttered Sumner, for he could see enough of the stranger's outline to tell he was a smaller man than the former captain of the steam-yacht "Sea Rover." However, this might be and probably was an equally desperate character, and Sumner felt his courage ooze rapidly away as he admonished Carroll to go easy and take no chances.

But before Carroll had taken three steps the fellow spoke.

"Don't come any nearer," he remarked, in a quiet but incisive voice. "I didn't expect to find anyone at home, and I'm not looking for trouble, but there'll be plenty of it quick enough if you try to stop me from getting away. I haven't damaged the yacht or taken anything that belongs to her, as you'll find."

"Perhaps not," replied Carroll, pausing in his advance when the man spoke; "but you've got a paper we want, and we shall have to ask you to give it up."

"I won't, not in a thousand years," was the quick retort. "In the first place, it isn't yours. In the second place, I wouldn't give it up if it was."

"It's mine," broke in Sumner indignantly. "I helped find it!"

"You don't get it if you talk all night," was the impatient answer. "Now do I go quietly, or will we have a rough-house?"

"Looks to me as if there was going to be a fuss," declared Carroll, instantly, as he began to move toward the cockpit. "Back me up, Sum, and we'll tackle the fellow." But he had hardly started forward when the stranger shifted his light to his left hand, shoved his right into a hip pocket, and quickly presented it within the circle of illumination holding a revolver.

"Now I advise you to stay right where you are," he remarked, quietly but firmly. "Keep perfectly quiet and calm," he continued, "and I'll just get into my boat and leave you in full possession of the 'Spitfire.'"

At this unlooked-for ending of the parley Carroll and Sumner stood stockstill in astonishment, not unmingled with fear of bodily harm. Meanwhile the stranger backed away to the place

where he had left his boat fastened, but of course he found nothing but the end of the cut painter.

"Oho!" he exclaimed. "So my boat's gone, is it? Well, I suppose you fellows have got one, which will do just as well as mine."

He flashed his light forward, first along one rail and then along the other. Presently discovering the tender, he started towards it.

"Get over on the other side and let me come past," he ordered, and under the persuasive influence of the revolver the boys stepped over to the starboard side and stood in silent indignation while the man went forward and untied their boat.

"I'm not going to stand for this," whispered Sumner, nervously. "Here goes to do something if I get shot for it."

"What did you say?" inquired the stranger, straightening up and facing them as he caught the undertone. An instant later with all his strength Sumner launched the boat seat full at him. Aim in the dark was uncertain, but the missile found its mark on the man's right forearm. He uttered a smothered cry of pain and the revolver clattered to the deck.

"Good boy, Sum; give him fits!" cried Carroll as he leaped forward. He bore down on the disconcerted fellow, but the result of his onslaught was entirely unexpected. The man was standing

close to the rail, just on the point of stepping into the tender, and the push that Carroll gave in his efforts to get a grip caused him to topple over backward. He fell with a thump into the row boat, and the latter now being unfastened, instantly began to float away from the "Spitfire."

Sumner, meantime, had found the revolver.

"Come back here and give us that paper," he commanded, taking aim, "or I'll shoot!"

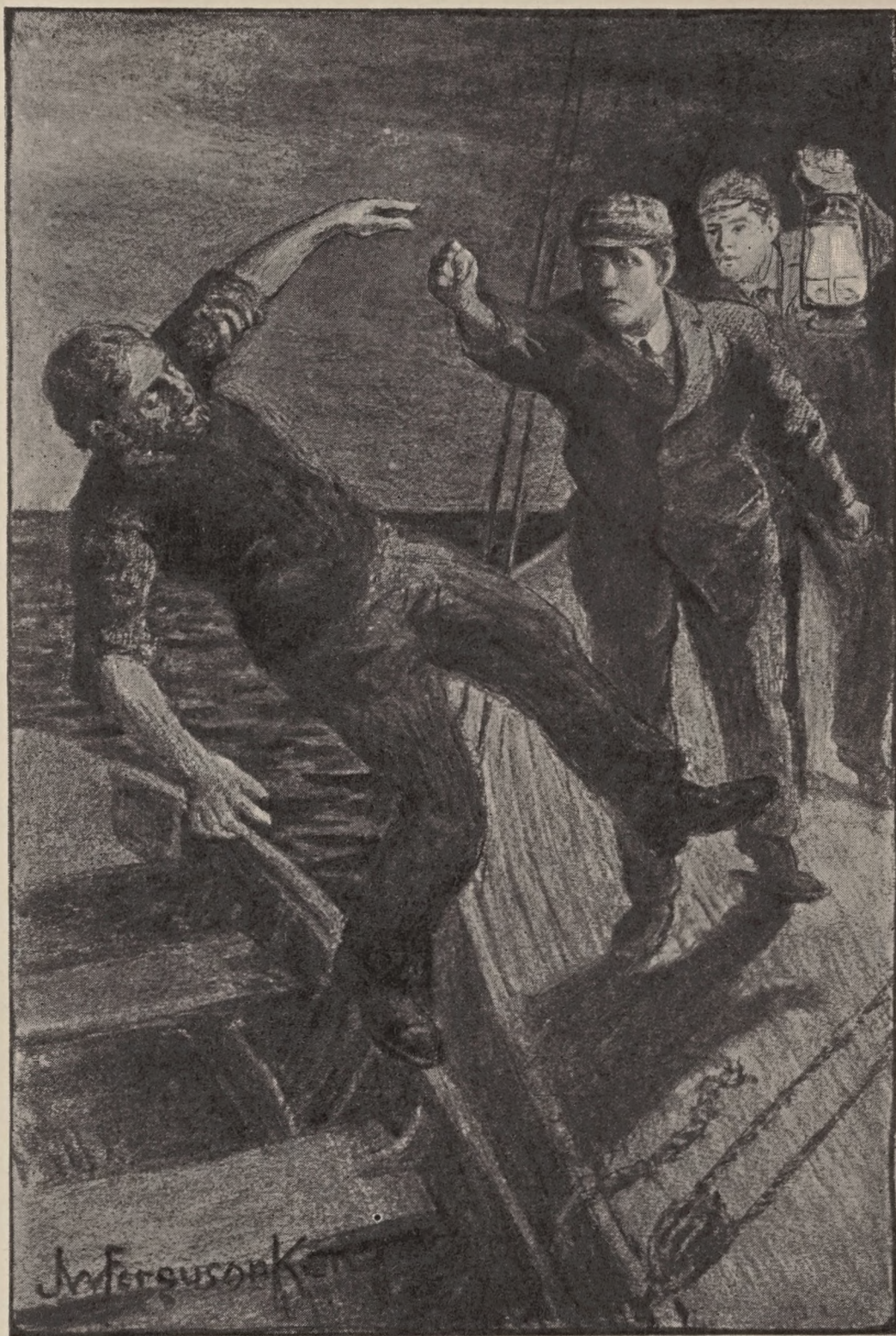
The man made no immediate reply. With much effort he picked himself up and fumbled at the oars. Dark as it was, yet it was evident to the boys that their enemy was having difficulty in using the arm on which the boat seat had landed with such telling force. The right oar didn't pull as strongly as the left, and as a result the boat went round in a circle.

Finally the man abandoned his attempts at rowing. He went to the stern and finding a sculling socket there, put an oar in position and sculled slowly away down the harbor.

"Are you deaf?" demanded Sumner, at this juncture. "If you don't come back here I tell you I'll fire."

"Shoot all you want to," sneered the man in the boat; "there isn't a single shot in the old gun, anyhow." And he resumed his sculling.

Sumner aimed the revolver at the water and pulled the trigger five times in rapid succession. "Snap — snap — snap — snap — snap!" the



“HE FELL WITH A THUMP INTO THE ROW BOAT.”

hammer fell on uncharged chambers. He threw it down in disgust.

"Aren't we a bunch of numb-heads?" he exclaimed.

"It's rotten luck," agreed Carroll, in deep chagrin. "But he don't get off like this, you know."

"Then let's holler for help," said Sumner. "He's getting farther away every minute."

"Pshaw! I know something better than that. You just watch *me*!"

Carroll, after looking about in the dusk, had begun rapidly to divest himself of his clothing.

"Going to swim ashore?"

"Not much! Do you see that yacht anchored just astern of us?"

Sumner strained his eyes in the direction indicated.

"Looks like a small boat had run afoul of her bow," he replied presently.

"That's just what's happened," declared Carroll, as he stood on the "Spitfire's" overhang and prepared to plunge in. "I think when we cut her loose that fellow's boat drifted over and caught on that sloop's bobstay." And he jumped into the water.

Did you ever go swimming after dark down on the coast of Maine, when the temperature of the ocean is about fifty, and the grateful heat of the sun is very noticeable for its absence? If so, you

know what Carroll was up against; but he wasted no time, and as it wasn't more than a hundred feet to the other yacht, his strong side-stroke quickly took him across. He pulled himself up into the rowboat — which, as he had surmised, had caught by an oarlock on the yacht's bobstay — and rowed hurriedly back to the "Spitfire."

Meanwhile Sumner looked the yacht over as well as he could in the dark. The lantern, which thus far had remained unlighted, had gone with their boat; but he felt of the companion fastenings, and found to his great astonishment that the doors had not been forced — no staples had been drawn, nothing broken. The Yale padlock hung there unlocked. Scratching a match, he stooped and entered the cabin. Everything seemed to be all right, contrary to his expectations. There were no signs of rummaging. Greatly wondering, Sumner pulled a towel for Carroll from a locker, and emerged into the standing-room just as the rowboat bumped alongside.

"Hand me my clothes, quicker than lightning, and hop in here and row," called Carroll. "That fellow isn't far off, I can hear him working away yet."

Sumner locked the cabin, clambered into the boat, and took the oars, and after a hasty rub down, Carroll donned his clothing. The boat was a small dory, built for seaworthiness rather than

speed, but she began to walk along when Sumner got down to work, and was soon rapidly overhauling the other boat.

"Harder on your right oar, Sum; I can see him now," called Carroll, after a few minutes. "He's working inshore as fast as he can go, and I'll bet he knows we are after him!"

When the race began, fully an eighth of a mile had intervened between the tender and the dory. The fugitive laid his course straight down the harbor, and evidently did not intend to land on the Cape. But when Sumner had cut in half the separating distance, the sculler discovered his pursuers, turned the boat abruptly to the right, and started for the South Stroudport shore.

"Let her go, Sum," admonished Carroll, who had finished putting on his clothes and stood up for a better view. "He's going to run in at the wharf just beyond the ferry slip. Guess his arm is getting better, for he's sculling to beat time."

Sumner, too, was digging in for all he was worth, and the dory was fairly smoking through the water.

"We'll catch him! We'll catch him!" cried Carroll exultantly. "We're just eating him right up."

But at that instant, when success seemed certain, the old "Governor Robie's" whistle tooted, her paddle-wheels began to revolve, and the ferry-boat started out of her South Stroudport slip,

bearing down directly on the narrow strip of water between the dory and the tender. Carroll uttered a snort of vexation and Sumner stopped rowing.

"Don't it beat the Dutch?" ejaculated Carroll. "What luck we have to-night!"

"Let's pull in at this side of the ferry slip and run up and stop the fellow at the head of the other wharf," Sumner suggested.

"No, that won't do," declared his chum, "for when he finds we've gone ashore, he'll take to his boat again."

It didn't take the "Governor Robie" long to pass, but it seemed an age to the two waiting impatiently in the dory, and the interruption gave the man in the tender just the chance he wanted. For when the ferry-boat was out of the way and Sumner was pulling the dory through her turbulent wake, Carroll saw the rowboat shoot in alongside a flight of steps at the next wharf, where without stopping for anything its occupant jumped out, ascended the steps, and hurried up the wharf. A few moments later Sumner and Carroll landed in the same place, paused an instant to secure both boats, and then dashed up the steps. There were no buildings on this wharf, but neither was there any artificial illumination. The shoreward end of the wharf abutted upon a street, and there hung an electric light. As the boys paused a moment at the top of the steps to reconnoitre, they

saw the fugitive run beneath the light, enter the gate of a private residence, and disappear in the dusk of the yard.

“Come on, Cal,” cried Sumner, starting forward on the run. “He’s gone into Captain Bucklin’s place!”

And they ran up the wharf on a chase that was not soon to be forgotten.

CHAPTER III

A CHASE IN THE DARK

THE Bucklin place was an acre or more in extent and fronted right on the harbor — in fact, between it and the shore there was only a street. The Captain had taken the ferry-boat directly home, told his wife all the news of his trip to Philadelphia, and by the time the boys were running up the wharf in pursuit of the thief, was abed and slumbering peacefully, quite unconscious that his innocent suggestion that they search the "Spitfire" had been the means of involving his friends in a series of exciting adventures.

The Captain's residence stood about midway of the lot. On the right were a lawn and some fruit trees, with gravel paths winding through to a grape arbor at the back; while at the left was more lawn, back of it a stable, and behind that a garden where the Captain practised fancy gardening.

As soon as the boys saw the man disappear in the Bucklin yard they were running in pursuit. Up the wharf, across the street, and in at the gate they dashed.

"This way — I saw him go to the left," said Carroll, whose long legs easily placed him in the lead. He rounded the corner of the house, followed by Sumner puffing hard, for he had not recovered his breath since his energetic rowing.

Sumner knew every foot of the Bucklin place, but his companion, although he was a very good friend of the Captain, was less familiar with his grounds. And so, before Sumner could utter a word of warning, Carroll left the path intending to investigate a noise in the rear of the stable; and the next instant he tripped and fell sprawling over a line of ornamental iron wickets.

"Great jumping crickets!" he growled, sitting up and rubbing his bruised shins. "I got mine that time, all right!"

Just then out back of the stable a series of outlandish cracklings and crashes broke the stillness. "Smash! Crash! Crackle! Crackle!"

"Someone else got his, too, I guess," Carroll muttered, rising painfully to his feet and then sitting down again to resume his rubbing. "What on earth was that racket?"

"I'll bet that fellow is smashing through the glass covers of the Captain's cold-frames, where he starts his early vegetables," exclaimed Sumner, who didn't feel courageous enough to continue his search in the dark yard alone, and stopped for his companion to recover himself.

"Starting early vegetables in cold-frames this

time of year," sniffed Carroll, still rubbing his shins. "You're crazy! The Captain don't leave his glass covers on all summer for the kids to break, I'll bet."

"Sure he leaves 'em on," Sumner insisted. "He's an old crank on — on — what do you call it? — intensive cultivation. He makes cucumbers and squashes and rhubarb and tomatoes grow about ten times as big as they ought to, you know — I mean he tries to. Anyhow, vegetables in July are early for fall and in September they'd be early for winter. Quit rubbing your shins, you baby, and come on. That fellow will be gone if we don't hustle, and I've got my wind now."

Sure of his whereabouts Sumner ran down the yard closely followed by Carroll, whose fall had not really injured him. The crashing noises had stopped, but out in the darkness of the garden somebody was filling the air with angry remarks.

"Here! This way, quick!" said Sumner, hurrying through a narrow space between the house and the stable, with Carroll a close second. Then they turned an abrupt corner and, before it was possible to pull up, dashed helter-skelter into a revolving clothes-reel filled with damp sheets and many other items of the family wash. In less time than it takes to relate it they found themselves literally swathed in a mass of damp clothes which clung more and more closely to them as they struggled with it in the darkness.

Then the reel-post, which had seen several years' duty and had decayed at the surface of the ground, broke short off with a loud snap, and boys, reel, and washing went precipitately to the ground — a turbulent, struggling ruin.

Up to this moment the Bucklin residence had been dark and quiet. But after years of seafaring it was second nature for the Captain to sleep with an ear and an eye open. A bright light now appeared at an upstairs window, and a head protruded into the outer air — the head of Captain Josiah.

“It's clothes-line thieves, by mighty!” he loudly declared, replying to questions uttered in a feminine tone at his back. “But they haven't gone far with the washing yet. Quick, gimme my britches, wife, and I'll go out and give them scalawags Jesse! What's that you said? Serves you right for letting the washwoman come so late in the day? Bosh, my dear! We'll do our washing at midnight if it suits us!”

Before Carroll and Sumner had fairly cleared themselves from the tangle of wet sheets and what seemed like hundreds of feet of clothes-line the Captain came on the scene, and he was in a state of high indignation. He had added trousers and a pair of carpet slippers to his usual sleeping attire, lighted a lantern and seized a revolver. Thus clad and armed he stole around the corner and abruptly confronted the boys.

"Now, by thunder, I've got you!" he growled, with grim satisfaction, "and here you'll stay till we telephone the police. Right about face and head for the house, you young imps!" he continued, flourishing the revolver. "And if you try to get away you'll wish you hadn't! It's a living shame that people can't leave a washing in their own yard over night — why — what — who?" He held the lantern up to the boys' faces, and paused in amazement.

"Bless my soul! Sumner Parker, is that you?"

"Yes, it's me, very much so, Captain Bucklin," replied Sumner, meekly, "and this is Carroll Morse."

"Well, well — I'm always glad to see my friends, boys, but isn't it just a little mite irregular? How in the world did you come here, anyhow?"

"We certainly didn't come to steal the washing," Carroll replied, "and we'll pay for all the damage."

The boys hastily explained the situation, while the Captain listened in amazement.

"Well, I'm sorry," he finally said; "but it looks as if I'd landed you in hot water with my advice."

"I'm afraid he's broken your cold frames all to pieces, too," ventured Sumner. "We just heard a fearful smash!"

"Cold-frames?" queried the Captain, starting

suddenly toward the rear of the stable. "Smashed my cold-frames, has he? I'll have his hide!"

Cold-frame windows were a tender subject with the Captain, for his had been broken before. It was only a step to the scene of destruction. A low hedge separated the forcing beds from the rest of the garden. In the darkness the fugitive had leaped the hedge and landed squarely in the middle of one of the glass covers. This had made the first loud crash, and the other noises had resulted from his attempts to extricate himself.

"The blank fool!" muttered Captain Bucklin as he viewed the havoc in the lantern light, and struggled with his emotions. "He must have cut his shins good and plenty. And he's still got the cipher, has he?"

"Yes, sir," Sumner replied.

"Well, then, you just hump yourselves after him! Here's his tracks." The Captain examined the ground where footprints pointing toward the back fence showed in the soft dirt.

"He's gone through to the next street between the houses there. You catch him and I'll give you ten dollars, by thunder! and I'll telephone the police headquarters to send an officer out to reinforce you."

He would have said more, but Carroll and Sumner, without further talk, left him to retrace his steps to the house and telephone the police. Briskly they straddled the Captain's vegetable

beds, and climbed over the fence into an adjoining garden.

"Better hurry here, and don't wake anybody up," whispered Sumner in a mysterious tone, as they picked their way through this cultivated plot, planning to pass through the yard of the house to which the garden belonged and thus reach the next street.

"I'd better hurry? Well, what's struck you?" demanded Carroll. "And what *am* I doing about now?"

"Oh, never mind. Just hustle, and don't wake up the Chadwicks — they live here, you know," was the odd reply.

There was no time to discuss the reasons for Sumner's peculiar request. Several minutes had been wasted through their mishaps on the Bucklin premises; and although the man had probably been delayed by troubles of his own, still the chances of overhauling him seemed to be getting momentarily slimmer. They were stealing forward as rapidly as possible, keeping a keen lookout, when suddenly a figure emerged from the doorway of a shed just ahead. Carroll, in the lead, paused, and abruptly stopped Sumner as he came along.

"I saw somebody come out of that shed, and he's got a bike," said he in a whisper.

"I can see something moving, too," Sumner rejoined. "Harry Chadwick's got a wheel. Maybe it's him; but if it's his mother, I'd rather

go around some other way," he added, in a tone of hesitancy.

"Probably it's Harry's great grandmother," snorted Carroll. "Come on and find out."

Forward again they went. The Chadwick residence fronted on Cape Avenue, and before it swung an electric light. As the boys rounded the rear of the house, they saw the fellow with the bicycle silhouetted against the street illumination. He trundled the machine swiftly to the curb, and paused in the full glare of the light to mount. No second glance was needed to tell Sumner and Carroll that he was the man of their search.

"Hasn't he got the nerve!" gasped Sumner. "He's pinched Harry Chadwick's wheel!"

Up to this moment the object of their chase seemed unaware that his pursuers were again on his trail; but now the boys' shoes made so much racket on the Chadwicks' back walk that he looked quickly around.

"Hold up there!" called Carroll. "Stop, I say!"

The fellow turned a bearded face toward them.

"Oh, it's you again, is it?" he remarked, without the least trace of excitement. Then he jumped into the saddle and started.

Carroll made a grand dash and a swift grab, but in vain. The wheelman easily distanced him, and went pedalling up the avenue toward the outer Cape. The boys did not pause a moment,

but went running along the middle of the street after him.

Cape Eastern has a picturesque coast line, in the main rocky and precipitous, with here and there a small sandy beach. Nearly the entire shore is bordered with cottages, many of them summer residences, and Cape Avenue, where the boys now were, was the main thoroughfare on which ran the electric car-line linking the outer coast with South Stroudport and the city.

It was now nearly eleven o'clock. Most of the houses were dark and there were no pedestrians in sight. A few doors ahead several young people were holding a jolly conversation on the veranda. At the curb stood an automobile, its bright headlights throwing a gleam up the street. Now a guitar was strummed melodiously, and two male voices began to sing, with youthful vehemence:

“Good-bye, my lady love,
You are my turtle dove,
You are the idol and darling of my heart —”

“Stop him!” shouted Carroll, hoping to attract the attention of the people on the veranda. “Stop that man on the bicycle!” And as they ran both repeated the cry several times.

It had the desired effect. The sudden shouting in the quiet night was like a thunder-clap from a clear sky. Two active young men and a bull

terrier ran out to the sidewalk at the first cry. At the first repetition they were in the middle of the street, and the third call found them reaching out to catch the bicyclist, who quickened his pace. In spite of their best efforts he dodged the clutches of the young fellows, but the dog had better luck. He ran, growling, straight at the wheelman, and made a leap for him. His jaws closed on a trouser leg; there was a bumping and thumping and the rider was nearly unseated. Something had to give way, and as the dog wouldn't, it had to be the trousers. There was a sound of rending cloth, and then back came the dog shaking a rag in his teeth, while the bicyclist regained his balance and rode hurriedly away.

"It's no use running any further," panted Sumner, coming to an abrupt stop as he realized the hopelessness of a pursuit on foot.

"Well, I'm hanged if it isn't Cal Morse and Sum Parker," cried the taller of the two youths who had ineffectually tried to head off the wheelman.

"Halloo, Rad Conway," was Carroll's retort, "and is that you, Alf Richardson?" to the other, who was swinging a guitar in one hand.

"That's just who it is," was the ready response. "What's the matter with you fellows?"

"Yes, do you really want to catch that man?" demanded Rad Conway.

"You bet we do," cried Sumner. "He's stolen something of ours, bu'sted Captain Buck-

lin's cold frames, and swiped Harry Chadwick's wheel, besides."

"Then hop into my buzz-wagon quicker'n scat," ordered Rad, as he ran to the automobile and began to crank up.

Carroll and Sumner needed no second invitation. They hustled into the big tonneau of the touring car, Alf Richardson deposited the guitar on the veranda and jumped up in front, and Rad, having started the motor, took the driver's seat.

"Oh, girls," he called to the rest of the veranda party who had come down to the sidewalk during the episode of the wheelman's passing, "won't you please telephone the police that Harry Chadwick's wheel has been stolen and the thief is riding out Cape Avenue on it — and — and Alf and I'll be back in a few minutes and say good-night. Hang on to your dog. Don't let him chase —"

Rad's remarks were cut short by the sudden starting of the car. He threw in the high gear and the machine leaped forward into the vivid pathway made by the headlights. Looking ahead the boys saw the bicyclist pass beneath an electric light. He must have heard the chug of the motor-car, for just then he turned and looked back. Catching sight of the lights coming up rapidly behind he gave a spurt, turned abruptly to the right, and rode into a side street.

"Up Burbank Street!" cried Alf, excitedly pointing. "See him, Rad?"

Rad grunted.

“ We’ll be hunting for a needle in a haystack if he loses himself in the cross streets between the Avenue and Ridge Street,” he grumbled. “ Hang hard!” And the automobile slid swiftly around the corner into Burbank Street.

We won’t attempt to give the details of that lively race. When in the mood Rad Conway was as hard a driver as one often finds. With the abandon of an excitement-loving disposition he gave himself energetically to the pursuit. Up Burbank Street, around into Cross Street, twisting swiftly from this short street to that one — always gaining on the wheelman, yet often losing sight of him in the darkness — with Alf shouting encouragement and Carroll and Sumner fairly standing up in excitement, Rad drove his motor-car. Finally they shot abruptly around a corner and found themselves on Ridge Street, a thoroughfare that ran along the high backbone of Cape Eastern, and joined Cape Avenue a short distance farther out. Here the electric lights were few and far between, but such as they were they showed the wheelman a little ways ahead, with his head down over the handlebars, riding for dear life.

“ What a fool he is to stick to the road!” cried Alf. “ Hit her up another notch, Rad! I see *his* finish!”

Rad shoved over the speed controller, and the automobile leaped ahead.

“ And so ut goes, so ut goes, rain an’ shine, hot an’ cold,” ruminated Policeman Dan Casey as he sauntered up and opened the police telephone call-box at the junction of Cape Avenue and Ridge Street, a mile and a half out from the ferry, at eleven o’clock on that July night which was furnishing so much excitement for Carroll Morse and Sumner Parker. “ Night in an’ night out, awearin’ out av me shoe-lither for me little three per, and niver annythin’ doin’ — no ixcitement — no ructions to warm me blood.”

“ This is Casey,” he said, putting his lips to the transmitter. “ Casey, at box nine. Everythin’s all right; nothin’s doin’ wid me. What’s that? A felly bu’stin’ windies at Cap’n Bucklin’s? Sure, I’ll go an’ look after thim at wanst. What’s that? Did you say wait a minute? They’s a thief on a stolen bike comin’ out Cape Avenoo wid a hole tore in his lift pant lig, is that ut? An’ otty-mobble is chasin’ ’im, is ut? Thry to stop ’im? Thot I will, sergeant. Is thot all? You don’t belave he’s armed? No? All roight, sor. I’ll nail ’im.”

He shut the call-box door with an energetic snap, and gave his belt a hitch. Then with a firm grip on his night stick he stepped out into the middle of the highway at the point where the two streets joined at an angle of forty-five degrees. Things were really coming his way now, and as the policeman looked and listened intently for

the bicycle thief and his pursuers his chest swelled perceptibly at the thought that this was his opportunity to show his mettle. Somewhere in the distance he could hear the rapid exhaust of a motor, but the sinuous curves of Cape Avenue as it skirted the bay shore prevented his seeing farther than the next light at the corner of the first side street.

He stood directly beneath an electric arc. Back from the road to his left stood an old white church, while on his right, separated from the highway by an evergreen hedge, was the summer residence of John Jacob Robertson. Down back of this he could have told you there was a small sandy beach bordering on a cove which could be reached in a roundabout way by a lane, or more directly by crossing the Robertson grounds; and from where he stood, Officer Casey — had he looked — could have caught the red flash of the revolving light on Spring Ledge. But his eyes and thoughts were elsewhere. His forehead was creased in a frown. The chug-chug was coming nearer, but not along Cape Avenue. It sounded out on Ridge Street.

“It’s wrong entirely,” muttered Casey, uneasily. “That’s not acoordin’ to me advices.”

Then suddenly, while he watched and wondered, out from the dusk of Ridge Street, bending low over the handles and pedalling like a streak, came the wheelman. The street was far from being macadamized, and both wheel and rider swayed and

jumped as they came swiftly toward the policeman. Not a hundred yards behind with its head-lamps glowing like enormous eyes was Rad Conway's automobile, and it was certainly knocking the speed law to smithereens.

"Stop!" shouted Casey, stepping forward and brandishing his stick. "In the name of the law, stop!"

With his head down and the air whistling past his ears, the cyclist neither saw nor heard the policeman till he was right upon him. He could not stop, so he tried to dodge. Casey also dodged, but in the same direction. Instantly a glancing blow laid the representative of the law flat on his back in the road, and the wheelman, losing control of his steed, rode with a smash into the Robertson hedge. The bicycle stuck fast, but the rider, clutching desperately at the air, rose from the saddle in a graceful curve and landed sprawling in a bed of cannas!

CHAPTER IV

MR. PIKE OF THE "DORABELLE"

A MOMENT after the abrupt dismounting of the bicyclist, Rad Conway stopped his automobile beside the prostrate policeman, and the four boys leaped out. Carroll and Sumner helped the officer to his feet.

"Which way did the fellow go?" demanded Carroll, eagerly. "Did you see a man on a wheel go by here just now?"

"If ye mane the cyclone that jist coom down the road and knocked me flat, I think wan musht have passed," replied the policeman, rather uncertainly, for he had not recovered from the shock he had received.

"But where is he? Which way did he go?" cried Rad as they stood beneath the electric light, looking about in all directions.

"Shure an' I belave he flew roight over me hid and lit in the bushes beyant," said Casey, as he tried to brush the dirt from his back.

"Say, fellows, here's the bike stuck in the hedge," announced Alf, who had crossed the road.

"The thief must have taken a header over into the yard. Hurry up, officer, and arrest him before he gets away from us!"

Thus adjured, Dan Casey bestirred himself to immediate action. Everyone had retired in the Robertson mansion, but John Jacob would surely have groaned if he had seen that quintette invade his premises — come scurrying in among the shrubbery and flower beds, and proceed to make as minute a search as was possible in the uncertain light.

"Here's where he landed, in this canna bed," declared Sumner, almost immediately, "but he's made himself good and scarce."

"No, sir! He won't linger 'round here," said Carroll, "and we'd better hurry along if we're going to catch him."

"Let me tell you something, fellows," broke in Rad Conway. "If that man knows the shore as well as he seems to know the streets, then he is aware there is a cove and a boat-house down back of this place where maybe he can steal a boat."

"Roight ye are," corroborated Officer Casey.

"And I suggest that we get down to the beach," continued Rad. "You four go right along, and I'll run the auto into the driveway here, and join you in a jiffy."

Across the lawn, past the house, and down through the unlighted grounds at the back they hustled, with eyes and ears on the alert. Without

seeing or hearing anything suspicious they presently arrived at the top of a masonry wall that overlooked the cove with its beach and boat-house dimly discernible below.

"The Robertsons have a flight of steps down to the beach somewhere along this wall," declared Alf, who was familiar with the locality. "This is where Rad keeps his motor boat, the 'Ginger.' Double-cylinder, ten-horse thirty footer — a corker," he went on. "Ah, here are the steps," after a minute's search. "Go easy, for they may be rickety." But they all reached the beach and the boat-landing without mishap, and scarcely had they begun looking for their man when Rad arrived.

The moon had set, but the sky had cleared, and the brilliant starlight made it fairly easy to distinguish objects. There was no one beside themselves on the landing, nor on the float moored to it, nor in the several boats fastened to the float.

"Listen!" admonished Sumner. "I'm sure I heard oars."

They paused, and the sound of oars being worked in frantic haste came from out in the cove. While they listened the noise grew fainter and fainter, for the boat was receding.

"Do you imagine that's him?" asked Sumner, in a tone of disgust.

"Of course it is," replied Carroll, gloomily. "Don't he always get away?"

"He's certainly a hustler," Alf declared, "for while we were poking around up in the Robertson yard he just sneaked down here, swiped a boat, and cleared out. He knew the ropes all right."

"Or else he's a mighty good guesser," said Carroll. "But this is the end of the trail for us, I think, and we might as well go back. We're more than obliged to you for your trouble, you and Rad — why, where is Rad?"

"Coming, with a lantern," cried that person, from the direction of the boat-house. "Cheer up, boys; it may not be as bad as it seems. Just help me take the covering off the 'Ginger,' and we'll give that fellow a run for his money that he won't soon forget."

As Rad spoke he lighted the lantern and approached the motor-boat, which was moored at one side of the float. Her standing-room was covered with a tarpaulin, but busy fingers soon unfastened and rolled it up out of the way, for the boys all jumped eagerly at his suggestion of continuing the chase in the "Ginger."

"Light the search-light, Alf, will you?" requested Rad. "You know how it works." This was a compressed-gas affair located on the forward deck, where the helmsman could flash it in any direction he wished.

Alf complied, while Rad busied himself about the engine.

"All aboard, fellows," cried Rad, in a moment.

"You take the wheel, Alf, and the search-light. Aren't you coming, Mr. Casey?" he queried, in some surprise, as all but the policeman promptly scrambled aboard.

"I musht not lave me beat anny longer," explained the officer, apologetically. "I have other juties to attind to."

"Then you won't join us?"

"No; but I will, av coorse, raport the case to me supayrior, and I wish ye good luck, byes."

"All right," rejoined Rad briefly. "Suit yourself, of course. Let go the mooring lines, boys," he commanded, and as Carroll and Sumner obeyed, Rad turned on the gasoline, cut in the spark and gave the fly-wheel a turn. The motor caught the explosion at once and the "Ginger" went off with a rush, leaving the policeman behind on the float.

"Keep your eyes peeled for trouble," cried Rad, above the steady chug-chug-chug of the exhaust, "for I'll bet dollars to doughnuts that something interesting will happen mighty soon!"

When he had adjusted the engine to his satisfaction, Rad came forward to where the others were standing back of Alf, peering along the bright beam of the search-light as it was thrown here and there in an effort to locate the oarsman they had heard.

"Guess we won't get back right away to say that good-night to the girls, Alf," he laughed. "Seen anything?"

“Not yet; but when we get clear of these small craft something may show up.”

The cove was a sheltered anchorage for a myriad of small sail-boats, and in and out among them Alf sent the “Ginger” in a series of curves, meanwhile playing the search-light liberally; but it was soon apparent that their man had not tried to hide on or near any of these.

The mouth of the cove opened on the broad ship-channel, the main thoroughfare from the inner harbor to the deep sea outside, and across this half-mile expanse riding-lights twinkled on craft at anchor back of Jackson Island, and from cottages on many islands.

“He must have gone outside, fellows,” exclaimed Sumner, presently. “I don’t believe he is in the cove at all.”

“Then send her out into the channel,” urged Rad, “and let’s see what we can find out there.”

“I don’t know exactly what this mad chase is all about,” he went on, “but it seems pretty urgent, judging by the swath we’re cutting. Of course I know about the bike, but what did he steal from you?”

“Yes; what did he take?” asked Alf, with pardonable curiosity.

“A paper,” replied Carroll.

“Something valuable, of course,” rejoined Rad.

“Well, to be frank with you, we don’t know

whether it's worth anything or not," admitted Carroll, "but when Sum and I got out to the yacht to-night and found this fellow appropriating something that wasn't his, on general principles we sailed in to stop him."

"But he gave you the slip," said Rad in a jocular tone.

"It has every appearance of it."

"And the worst of it is, he has managed to stay just about so far away ever since," broke in Sumner.

"And he's got the paper yet," added Carroll in a sore tone, recalling the revolver that wasn't loaded.

"But, by George, there he goes!" exclaimed Rad at that instant. "Don't you see him? There, 'round the eastern point!" he cried. "Flash the light to the right!"

Instantly Alf swung the search-light around, and the four on the "Ginger" saw a rowboat, with a single occupant rowing hard, go scuttling out of sight around the high rocky point that marked the eastern or seaward side of the cove's entrance. Then the steering wheel received a quick turn, the "Ginger" veered sharply to starboard, and dashed obliquely across the mouth of the cove in hot pursuit.

"What a cinch!" cried Rad excitedly. "He's as good as nailed already!"

"I'll bet he's heading for one of those vessels

anchored in back of Jackson Island," exclaimed Sumner. "There's always a lot of little lumber schooners or fishermen or something else lying there waiting for a fair wind."

"But he'll never make it in the world," replied Alf, gleefully. "Don't she just smoke through it, though! Here we go past the point! Now we'll be able to see the fellow again —"

"Chug! Chug! Chug!" puffed the motor. The "Ginger" was doing her very best. Rapidly she was cutting down the distance that intervened between her and the rowboat, which was again in sight. And then, utterly without warning, she ran upon a flat ledge that extended out under water from the point, and, with a rushing up-shoot and shock that threw the boys about in ridiculous confusion, stopped short. Though the propeller still churned industriously the motor-boat refused to budge a hair.

"Well, I'll be blistered! I thought we were in deep water!" gasped Alf, greatly chagrined, as the quartette picked themselves up.

"'Tisn't your fault at all," blurted out Rad, as he ran aft and shut off the engine. "I knew this ledge was here, but in the excitement I forgot it and let you run plunk on it."

"Lordy, but that must have ripped her keel right off!" was Sumner's exclamation.

"Oh, no, I don't believe the 'Ginger' is damaged," said Rad. "Besides her skeep, she's

got a heavy brass shoe running the whole length of her keel, and she slid out on it just as if she was on a skate runner. But what gets me, is how we'll get loose."

"Are we stuck too hard to pull her off by reversing the engine?" asked Carroll, looking over the side.

"She draws two feet and a half aft, and there is likely not more than two feet of water on the ledge now, with the tide dropping every minute; still you never can tell what you can do till you try," and Rad started the propeller on the reverse at top speed. The only perceptible effect, however, was the strong vibration that ran through the hull. Then for several minutes they pushed and shoved over the side with the emergency oars at the sea-covered ledge; but to no purpose. Every moment the rowboat was getting farther away — every moment the chances of catching its occupant grew poorer; but the "Ginger" simply stuck right there with fearful stubbornness.

"Well, boys," said Carroll at length, in great disgust, "I've been in swimming once to-night, and if it's up to me, I can get out and push now."

"I've got it, fellows!" broke in Rad. "Rock her — come aft and rock her hard! Perhaps we can shake her off!"

Suiting the action to the word, all four went aft, and swaying their bodies in unison, quickly had the "Ginger" rocking. The propeller was

still churning on the reverse motion, and, as a result, soon there came a slight grating and sliding under the keel.

“Hurrah, boys, she’s starting!” said Alf. “Keep her rocking!”

And surely enough the stranded “Ginger,” starting slowly at first, backed with momentarily increasing speed off the ledge into deep water, and everyone heaved a sigh of intense relief.

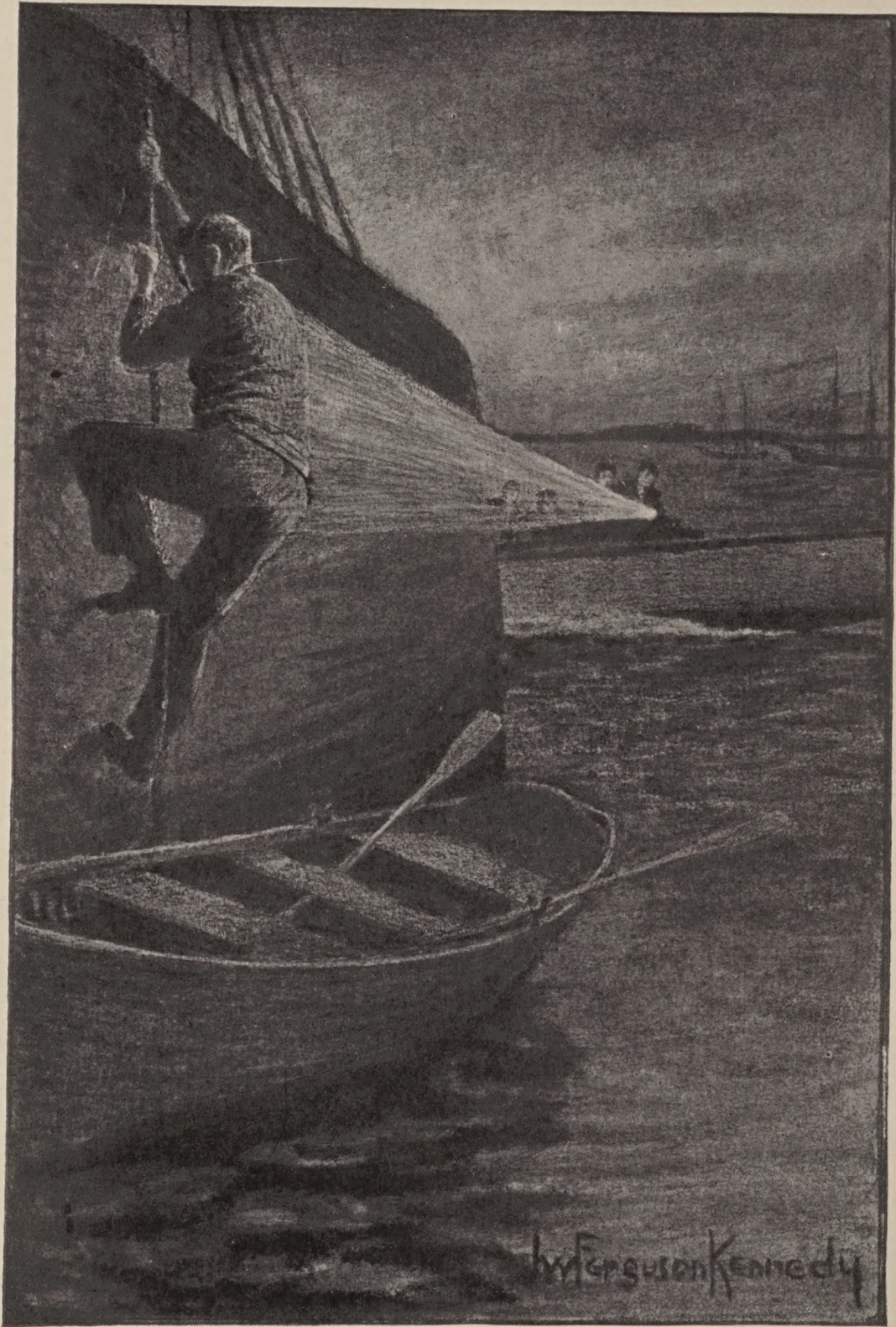
“Now get busy at the wheel again, and let’s get after that fellow,” exclaimed her owner.

Over went the reversing bar, and the motor-boat resumed the interrupted chase. Out across the deserted ship-channel she tore, bent on making up lost time. Far across the stretch of water where the search-light could scarcely make itself shown the rowboat was faintly visible, rapidly approaching the anchorage ground.

The “Ginger,” however, was easily reeling off twelve miles an hour, and it did not take her long to cut a foaming wake across the channel. Alf kept the search-light busy, and as they shot past the nearest schooner the boys caught a glimpse of the rowboat dodging under the stern of a fishing steamer a hundred yards farther on.

“There he is!” cried Sumner dancing with excitement. “See! Just around that po’gy boat!”

“I saw him,” replied Alf; and a moment later the motor-boat also rounded the steamer’s stern in hot pursuit.



“ALF TURNED THE LIGHT FULL UPON HIM.”

" 'Dorabelle of Rockland,' " read Carroll as Alf flashed the search-light on her name. Then the light, gleaming along the steamer's port side, revealed the rowboat lying there empty, and her late occupant climbing up a rope to the rail. Alf turned the light full upon him. It was their man; there was no doubt about it.

" Hold on, there! " called Sumner as the " Ginger " ran alongside and stopped. " We want you! "

But the fellow climbed hurriedly over the rail, and when Alf made a grab for the rope it was pulled up out of sight.

" Halloo, on board there! " Sumner called loudly. There was no reply, however, though they could hear footsteps on the deck, and steam hissed intermittently from a safety-valve.

" Halloo, there! Wake up! " Still no response.

Then followed a loud and energetic chorus of calls from the boys, and presently a man came to the rail and looked down.

" What's the matter? " he inquired, gruffly.

Alf Richardson twisted the search-light around and tilted it upward until its full rays fell on the speaker. It showed him to be tall and sparely built; a slouch hat was pulled down over a thin hatchet face; he was one of those long, gaunt, down-east Yankees, without a superfluous ounce of fat upon him, rugged and " tough as a boiled owl. "

" Say, turn that thing off, won't you, please? " he requested, for the strong light made him blink.

" Now what do you want? "

" Are you the captain of this steamer? " asked Carroll.

" I am. What of it? "

" We want the man that just went on board."

" Who are you, anyhow? "

" We're from Stroudport," replied Carroll.

" Have you got an officer with you? "

" No, we haven't," admitted Carroll, " but that fellow stole a paper from us and we want it back."

" Oh, he has, has he? " retorted the Captain. " Mr. Pike! " he bawled turning on his heel. " Mr. Pike, come here! You're wanted."

After a short delay another man joined the Captain in response to his call. He was a well-built fellow, wearing a full beard. The search-light showed that he was the man they had been chasing, but in spite of everything that had occurred, he gazed down on the occupants of the motor-boat with well-simulated curiosity.

" What are they after, Captain Field? " he inquired quietly.

" Why, Mr. Pike," replied the Captain, " these fellows say you have stolen a paper from 'em, and the've simply got to have it back again. Is that so? "

"Who are they?" inquired Mr. Pike, indifferently.

"You know us well enough," cried Carroll Morse, impatiently. "We've been chasing you for nearly two hours. You took a paper from the 'Spitfire,' and we want it. Come now, shell out!"

Mr. Pike uttered an exclamation of mild surprise.

"As I live, Captain Field," he averred, solemnly, "I never saw these fellows before. I don't know anything about the paper they mention, and I never heard of the 'Spitfire' in all my life."

"That's a lie!" promptly responded Carroll. "He's got the paper on him this minute, Captain. We saw him have it!"

"If 'twasn't sort of unhandy I'd just drop down there and punch your head for that remark, young fellow," said Mr. Pike.

"Oh, try it on! Try it on!" jeered Rad, instantly. "Come down; we'll make it interesting for you!"

"Say, Captain," called Sumner, "if you don't believe we've been chasing him for a long time then see if there isn't a big piece of cloth gone from the bottom of his left pant leg, where he got nabbed by a dog! You just take a look, Captain!"

"Sure, Captain Field, look at my pants all you want to," acquiesced Mr. Pike, good-naturedly.

The Captain stooped and apparently felt of the bottom of the mate's trouser legs.

"His pants are all right," he declared after a brief examination.

"Aw, he's changed 'em, then," said Sumner, in an aggrieved tone.

"Just you see here," the Captain retorted, somewhat brusquely, "you fellows are barking up the wrong tree. It don't do you any good to come 'round here with your cock-and-bull story about a stolen paper. I know Mr. Pike and he says he didn't take the paper, and that settles it so far as I'm concerned. If you ain't satisfied, why, take it to the courts and try it out there; I ain't got any more time to listen to your talk. Our safety-valve's been on the pop for ten minutes now, and we've got to get out of here."

To say the quartette in the "Ginger" were put out by Captain Field's attitude is to state it very mildly. However, there seemed to be nothing they could do toward recovering the cipher unless they boarded the "Dorabelle" and tried to take it by force. Such a proceeding was sure to end in failure, as their common-sense plainly told them. But an idea popped into Carroll's head, and he whispered a moment with the others, while the Captain and the mate stood silent at the rail.

The rowboat in which Pike had come aboard, and which the boys supposed he had stolen from

the cove landing, was idly floating alongside, and Alf reached out the boathook and took possession of it, fastening the painter to a stern cleat of the motor boat.

"Leave that boat alone!" exclaimed the Captain, when he saw what was going on.

"Tell your friend Mr. Pike that we will take pleasure in returning the rowboat he stole from the Robertson landing to-night," retorted Carroll ironically.

"He didn't steal it," declared the skipper of the steamer. "That's my boat, and if you take it you'll get yourselves into trouble." He spoke as if he really believed what he was saying.

"Of course we would hate to hurt your feelings by calling you a liar, like Mr. Pike there," answered Carroll quickly. "But we happen to know where this boat came from, and you can take it from me that it's going back!"

"Look here, Pike, whose boat is that?" anxiously demanded the Captain. "Ain't that the boat that was got out this afternoon?"

"It sure is, Captain Field," the mate returned, in a soothing tone. "And they haven't any business to take it."

"Then what dory was that you went out to the yacht in?" demanded Carroll instantly.

"Why, that boat came from —" began Pike, then he stopped, realizing he had been caught.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he lamely concluded.

"One thing is sure," jeered Carroll. "You may be a good mate for a po'gy boat, Pike, but you're a mighty poor liar. Go ahead, Rad," he continued, for Conway was already bending over the engine. "It's no use for us to hang around here."

But before the "Ginger" started the Captain broke out again.

"Say, are you going to steal that boat right under my nose?"

Rad paused in his operations, and Carroll replied:

"You've been so accommodating to us, Captain Field, that it may seem like rubbing it in to run off with a boat that one of your men has stolen from someone else; but that's just what we're going to do. And 'if you ain't satisfied,' " he continued, with just a touch of malice in his voice, and the slightest possible imitation of the Captain's nasal twang, "'why, take it to the courts and try it out there. I ain't got any more time to listen to your talk. Our safety valve's been on the pop for ten minutes now, and we've got to get out of here.' "

"You'll catch it for this," cried Captain Field wrathfully. "I'll have the law on the whole of you, by thunderin' mighty, and you'll be sorry you was ever out here to-night."

"Oh, as for that, we're sorry already," readily agreed Carroll. "But let me tell you one thing. Even if this was your boat, which we know very well it isn't, I wouldn't give it up to you until you made your lying mate there hand over the paper he stole. And if you want to have the law on us, just call on Carroll Morse, care of the Stroudport Yacht Club."

Then the "Ginger" went off at a lively clip, towing the rowboat, while the captain of the "Dorabelle" shook his fist after them in impotent rage and called the boys about all the bad names he could think of.

"It's too darned bad, boys," said Alf Richardson to Carroll and Sumner, as the motor-boat puffed back toward the cove. "Of course Rad and I haven't any personal interest in this affair but we don't like to see you get thrown down."

"What else could you expect when one lied and the other backed him up?" asked Sumner.

"Just one thing is getting on my nerves now," broke in Carroll, who was apparently bearing up philosophically under the failure to get back the cipher. "And it's this: whose boat are we towing behind, Robertson's or the 'Dorabelle's'?"

"What's that?" asked Rad coming forward from the engine, and Carroll repeated his remark.

"Dead easy to find out," said Rad. "The boat's probably got her name on the stern. I

know all of Robertson's boats have, and if she came from the 'Dorabelle' she ought to have, too."

The engine was stopped and the rowboat was pulled up alongside. Rad scratched a match and leaned down over her stern.

"Geewhillikins!" he ejaculated, as his eyes made out a name there. "Boys, she belongs to the 'Dorabelle'!"

"Now I'd have been willing to swear that fellow was lying about it," said Carroll, a good deal nonplussed.

"No wonder the Captain was hot," Alf remarked, bursting into a laugh. "Oh! but this is too good!"

"How do you suppose Pike came to leave his boat in Robertson's cove?" asked Sumner, wonderingly.

"Where'd you see him first?" inquired Rad, by way of answer.

"On Val Brandon's 'Spitfire,' anchored over opposite the yacht club," said Cal, "and he had a boat with him then."

"I'll bet I can explain the mystery," Rad declared. "He rowed over to the cove from the steamer; went up to the avenue and took a trolley car down to the ferry; pinched a boat and went out to the yacht. That explains how he found a boat so quickly at Robertson's when we chased him back to the cove."

"I guess you're dead right, Rad; but what are we going to do with this confounded boat?" grumbled Carroll. "I don't feel much like taking it back and eating humble pie with that captain."

During this brief colloquy the "Ginger" was drifting leisurely down the channel with the tide. There was no wind, and all was still about them. Suddenly the momentary silence following Carroll's declaration was broken by the dull boom of a distant explosion, followed by a hissing sound. While they listened, questioning its cause and source, a steamboat whistle began blowing a frenzied alarm.

"Toot! Toot! Toot! Toot! Toot! T-o-o-o-t! T-o-o-o-o-o-t! T-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-t!"

Beginning with a fierce shriek, the sound rapidly dwindled in volume, and finally died away in a low wail, as if the steam pressure were fast diminishing.

"It's over the other side of Jackson Island," said Sumner, breaking the strained silence on board the "Ginger."

"There is surely a steamer in trouble over there, boys," Rad exclaimed. "Shall we run over? All right, Alf; then put her about. We'll lay Captain Field on the shelf for the present, and find out what the matter is down the harbor."

As he spoke he started the engine; and, with

the "Dorabelle's" boat trailing behind, the motor-boat went down channel at her best gait while her youthful occupants stared impatiently ahead.

CHAPTER V

THE "BAY QUEEN'S" LAST TRIP

THE island steamer "Bay Queen" had touched at Peaked Island on her last trip for the night. Though it was eleven-thirty o'clock, the big dancing and amusement pavilion near the head of the wharf was just emptying its crowd of late-staying pleasure-seekers, and they were trooping down aboard the "Bay Queen," and her consort the steamer "Casco," which was tied up at the same landing.

Forward on the "Bay Queen's" upper deck a sturdy, pleasant-faced young man, clad in a gray suit and wearing a yachting cap, stood by the rail watching the throng move along under the electric lights.

"Come up here, Val Brandon, and let me get a good squint at you," cried out a jovial voice from the pilot-house. "I haven't seen you for an age, youngster."

The look of surprise on Val Brandon's face at this unexpected sally changed to one of sincere pleasure as he turned and recognized the speaker.

He ran quickly up a short flight of steps, and grasped the hand of the " Bay Queen's " captain.

" I never dreamed of finding you on this steamer. When did you quit the ' Storm King,' Captain Roderick? "

" Why, last year, soon after we chased all over the Maine coast for you young scalawags," was the jolly rejoinder. " How's the life insurance business? "

" First class," Val replied. " Everybody's paying up regularly, and nobody's dying off. But how did you come to be captain of the ' Bay Queen' ? "

" Just wait till we get under way and I'll spin you the yarn," and the former master of Captain Josiah Bucklin's tug " Storm King " stuck head and shoulders out of a window to watch the progress of embarkation.

" Biggest part of the crowd's going aboard the ' Casco,' " he remarked presently, " because we've got to make Cushman's Island, while she has a straight run for Stroudport. I'm glad of it. We're short handed to-night — my mate took sick and went ashore at Beeg Island, and here I am left to do all the steering as well as the bossing. I hate to have a crowd aboard with a short-handed crew — always keep thinking what if an accident should happen."

" There goes the ' Casco,' " remarked Val, as the other steamer pulled out from the wharf and

headed toward the city. “ She’s loaded chock-a-block — just look at her! ”

“ Sure thing; and all we get is the Cushman Island folks and the city people that don’t enjoy being packed in like sardines. There are some, you know,” he added, slyly, “ that really don’t enjoy it! ”

The “ Bay Queen’s ” last passenger was now aboard and the gang plank hauled in. The Captain gave a toot on the whistle and the lines were cast off. “ Ting ” went the engine-room gong; the propeller began revolving, and the steamer moved away from the landing, heading down the channel between Peaked and Jackson Islands.

On the roof of the pilot-house was a powerful electric search-light, and this, under the control of the helmsman, now threw out its radiance, picking up in succession the buoys that marked the channel. Occasionally flashing to one side of the course, it threw a glare on a vessel at anchor, or some homeward-bound launch party, or a building on shore, making these objects stand out in ghostly brilliance against the black background of night.

“ Got to amuse the passengers now and then, you know,” laughed Captain Roderick after he had thrown the light in a semicircle from port to starboard and back again. “ They’re always looking for some fancy-work, and you’ll find most of ’em on the upper deck now watching it.

"I was sick of being away from home, Val," said the Captain, at length. "Do you know; the day we brought you fellows back from Tower Island to Stroudport was my fiftieth birthday — the day on which I had time and again declared I would settle down and stay at home. That was my last trip on the 'Storm King.' Just took my little hoard out of the stocking and bought some stock in the Stroudport Steamboat Co., and here I am, the 'admiral of the fleet.' "

"Well, Admiral, it seems to me they handed you a lemon for a flag-ship," said Val jokingly. "The old 'Bay Queen' was built out of the remains of the 'Ark,' wasn't she? "

"She's so old she's petrified in spots," the Captain chuckled, "but her hull is sound from garboard to top strake; and her engines wasn't bought so fearfully long ago; but she'll have to get a new boiler next season. Say, do you own the 'Spitfire' now? "

Val replied in the affirmative.

"Well then, just listen to me. You want to trade her off and get a motor-boat. Those are the slick boys for cruising! You don't care a continental whether it's a head wind or a dead calm, you plug along just the same. If you're bound alongshore this summer I know just the boat you ought to go in, too. Built last year, but in dandy shape; thirty-five feet over all, which means a lot more room than you get on a sail-

boat with a jib-boom included in the measurements. She's got a roomy trunk-cabin, with sleeping-room for four, and an engine that'll shove her fourteen miles an hour easy.”

“ And chew up gasoline by the barrel, eh? Where is she, and what's her name? ” queried Val, for he had been looking into the subject of motor-boats himself.

“ Her name's the ‘ Screamer,’ and she belongs to me,” replied Captain Roderick, with a significant smile that Val glimpsed by the glow from the binnacle light as his companion bent forward.

“ Do you mean — ? ” began Val, curious to know what his friend had in mind. But the question was destined to remain unfinished.

At that moment from below came the sudden shock and loud report of an explosion, immediately followed by the hiss of escaping steam. Almost instantly the air amidships on both sides of the “ Bay Queen ” was white with clouds of steam that belched forth from the engine-room. The feathery vapor mounted to the upper deck and trailed aft among the passengers there. Loud exclamations of alarm came from them even as Captain Roderick snatched open the engine-room speaking tube. Quick as was the Captain, the engineer below was quicker. His agitated voice came up the tube almost before the Captain had placed his ear to it.

“ It's something fierce down here! ” cried the

engineer. "I think she's blown out a piece of her crown sheet, and the fire is scattered all over the place!"

"Are you hurt?"

"No."

"Where's your fireman?"

"Up here with me; he's all right."

"And the steam?"

"Dropped to eighty pounds already."

"Start your pump and wet down the fire," ordered the captain.

"I can't reach the pump," groaned the engineer. "It's right in the live steam."

"Keep your nerve then! I'll be down!" And the tube snapped shut.

"My heavens, what a man that is for an emergency!" the Captain muttered. "Peaked Island landing a mile astern, and Cushman's half a mile ahead!"

"Here, Val Brandon, take this wheel!" and he gave his companion a shove toward it. "Head her for Jackson Island—we'll get there if we can."

He opened a locker and produced two revolvers.

"Put one of these in your pocket; there's no telling what panic may strike the passengers. Thank God, the biggest crowd went on the 'Casco.' Show your grit, for to-night I've got to depend on you!"

Val brought the steamer around and headed

for Jackson Island. In the first few moments he stood there the steam pressure dropped so fast that the electric lights grew dim and slowly and more slowly throbbed the engines.

“There is no danger!” He heard the loud reassuring voice of the Captain as he moved among the passengers. “There is no danger! It’s only a slight explosion! Don’t be alarmed! We are perfectly safe!” Then his voice was lost in the ever-present hiss of steam.

Val at the wheel wondered if the steam would last till they made Jackson Island; wondered how the Captain would get his passengers to the city, and if — when suddenly Captain Roderick rushed in like a whirlwind, seized the whistle cord, and blew a succession of sharp, quick blasts.

“Thank heaven, there’s still steam enough! Keep it going,” he ordered, in a tense voice, “just as long as the whistle will sound.”

“Is it as bad as that? Won’t we make it?” demanded Val, feeling rather than seeing the agitation in the Captain’s demeanor.

Before the Captain could reply there was an outcry from the lower deck.

“Fire! Fire! Fire! The steamer’s on fire!” cried someone with all the strength of his lungs.

“The fool!” gritted the Captain. “My boy, the stoke-hole is a regular hell, and the pump is damaged so we can’t start it.”

“How’s the steam?”

"Fallen to forty and the machinery's going to stop in a minute. Tie the whistle open, put the wheel in the becket, and follow me!" And he strode out on deck.

Captain Roderick was a man of grit and resource, who more than once had looked death in the face without flinching, but the present situation was one to take every ounce of stamina he possessed.

Val did as directed, and ran after the captain. As he reached the deck the "Bay Queen's" propeller stopped, the electric lights dimmed to red strings and went out, and the shriek of the whistle died to a low wail. Somewhere below decks sounded the crackling of flames as fire gained headway in the tinder-dry woodwork, and whiffs of smoke came to his nostrils. But the exigencies of the situation, instead of paralyzing his energies, roused him to action. All sense of personal danger was lost in a strong desire to work for the safety of all. A glance around told him, however, that others had seen the plight of the steamer. Whistles were tooting not far away, and lights were dancing over the water toward them. No doubt boats of all kinds would flock to the scene; but despite all these reassuring things, the explosion, the cry of fire, and the agonizing but necessary shrieks of the whistle, had set many of the passengers in a panic.

The condition of things on the upper deck was one to baffle description. Darkness reigned, and

in it women and men, too, were pushing hither and thither. Some were shrieking, some swearing, others praying. One woman, in strong hysterics, was uttering bloodcurdling wails. A few cool heads, blessed with presence of mind — that ability to exercise common sense while under the stress of great excitement — were trying to calm the frightened, but with little result.

Val overtook the Captain just as that person made a loud announcement.

“ We are heading for Jackson Island near by! There are plenty of life-preservers for everybody right over your heads! I call for volunteers to launch the boats and fight the fire! ”

“ Where do you want me? ” asked Val, seizing the Captain’s arm.

“ Calm ’em down the best you can here, and then get some men to go up and help lower the boats. I’ll go below and fight fire! ” He disappeared, and Val was left to face a chaotic and terrifying situation.

“ I must get ’em to *do* something,” he muttered, clenching his fists; “ something to take their attention off the danger! ”

“ Here, men! ” he called authoritatively, elbowing his way into the thickest part of the crowd. “ Every man pull down life-preservers from the racks overhead, and fasten them on the women and children! ”

Loudly repeating this order again and again,

he made a circuit of the deck. He pulled down life-preservers and forced them into the hands of the men.

“Here you! Get busy!” he ordered. “There’s boats coming from everywhere to take us off! Keep cool! Keep your grit! We aren’t hurt yet and won’t be!”

It was surprising how soon a semblance of order came out of the turmoil. Inaction, the hardest thing to endure in the face of crying danger, was followed by energetic work on the part of several volunteers. Leaving most of them working at the life-preservers, Val took half a dozen men and climbed to the roof of the upper deck where they found two deck-hands working desperately at the life-boats.

As they worked in feverish haste to uncover the heavy boats and get them over the side, another crew under the direction of the Captain took service with the engineer and fireman and began passing buckets of water from the rail to the fire-room. But the fire-fighting did little good. The flames were seething about the stoke-hole and up into the engine-room. Oily floors and bulkheads kiln-dried by the heat of the boiler burned fiercely. Clouds of dense smoke poured from the doors and windows of the engine-room, making it almost impossible for the bucket brigade to work at all, while the noise of the fire as it worked upward and outward through the

waist of the steamer could be distinctly heard all over the boat.

When she lost her headway the “ Bay Queen’s ” anchor had been dropped, and now she swung idly in the ebbing tide. But the signals of distress were being noticed. A harbor steamer of another line was hurrying across from Little Hog Island, flashing its search-light as it came. From where Val was working strenuously at the boat-falls he could see, over the crest of Jackson Island, a number of red and green lights coming from Stroudport; and before the first life-boat had been lowered the “ Toot — toot! ” of a motor-boat sounded close at hand, a small search-light gleamed in the dark, and Rad Conway’s “ Ginger ” ran alongside to the rescue.

“ On the launch there! ” shouted the Captain.
“ Will you stand by these boats? ”

“ You bet we will! Let ’em come! ” answered four lusty throats as the motor-boat stopped under the port gangway, and brought her search-light to bear on it.

Instantly a dozen men jammed forward to leap aboard her. Quick as a flash the Captain whipped out his revolver.

“ Women and children first! ” he insisted.
“ Women and children first! The first man that boards that boat gets shot! ”

Grumbling but cowed the fellows slunk back. Then with many uncertain hitches the unused

boats were lowered. Despite choking smoke and the crackling of flames close at hand the passengers crowded down the companion to the lower gangway.

Almost as quickly as it takes to tell it the "Ginger" herself, the boat she had been towing, and the four life-boats, were filled — the women and children getting the first chance. Dropping from the gangway to the motor-boat the passengers were thence passed along to the other boats. Then with the five heavily loaded boats strung out behind in tow, and loaded to the gunwales herself, the "Ginger" moved away to land her human freight at Jackson Island.

Events now followed each other in rapid succession. The "Ginger" had carried away more than a hundred passengers, but still over fifty remained. The most of them were crowded away aft. A few, and among them Val Brandon, cut off from the rest by the fire amidships, were as far up in the bow as they could get. For when Val and the other men who had worked without respite to rip the stiff tarpaulin covers from the life-boats, to swing the davits outboard, tug the heavy boats into launching position and then lower them, — when, I say, their work was done and they hustled down the ladder close by the pilot-house, they found the flames making such headway that it was foolhardy to try to reach the after-deck.

Then, of a sudden, while they anxiously awaited rescue, with a roar the fire burst its bounds and flamed aloft. It spit and crackled and licked up the painted surfaces. Mounting higher and higher, at last it laid its demon clutches on the pilot-house, till from that vantage a lurid pillar of fire streamed high and shone far over the waters of Stroudport Bay.

But before this culmination which made life on the steamer unendurable, the steamer “ Cadet ” arrived. Bringing her broadside against the “ Bay Queen’s ” stern, she at once took off everybody on the after-decks. At the same time, Val and his companions forward saw an odd-looking steamer approach. She brought her bow up against that of the “ Bay Queen.”

“ Git off there! ” called a drawling, nasal voice. “ Jump aboard here, before ye’re roasted alive! ”

No one needed a second invitation. Those on the upper deck scrambled down by the deck braces. All of them were men, and in less than a minute they were aboard the “ Dorabelle of Rockland,” the odoriferous po’gy steamer.

“ Best I can do is to land you at Cushman Island,” declared Captain Field to the smoked and blistered refugees on his ill-smelling deck as the “ Dorabelle ” drew slowly away from the doomed “ Bay Queen.”

Now the stress was over Val was decidedly

tired. He was uninjured, but felt that one steamboat fire would last him a lifetime.

Wearily he sat down on the rail and waited. A lantern or two faintly lighted the deck of the fishing steamer, showing coils of rope, seine boats, and other paraphernalia of the calling strewn about in apparent confusion. It seemed an age before they bumped up against the wharf at Cushman Island.

"All ashore, and never mind the thanks!" called Captain Field.

As Val started hastily to cross the deck, unobserved by anybody, he tripped on a coil of rope in the dark, struck his forehead violently against the gunwale of a seine boat, and fell stunned. There he lay in the deep shadow while the "Dorabelle" discharged her unexpected passengers, steamed away from the landing, and went down the ship channel out to sea.

CHAPTER VI

ON BOARD THE "DORABELLE"

WHEN, after many minutes, consciousness came slowly back to Val Brandon as he lay stunned in the shadow of a big seine-boat on the deck of the fishing steamer, his first sensation was a fierce throbbing pain in the head. Too dazed he was, in fact, to realize at first where he was or what had happened to him; but by degrees as he lay quiet his head cleared, the pain eased and memory returned.

The pulsation of the machinery, the seething and splashing of water alongside, and especially the heaving of the hull, told him they were under-way, and probably outside of the harbor.

As this thought took form in his mind he became aware that two persons were talking in low voices not far from him, and in the quiet he overheard a good deal of what they said.

"— And about a quarter of a mile in from the east shore is a tumble-down old farmhouse," he overheard a drawling voice say, earnestly. "Well, I guess 'twas built over a hundred years ago, per-

haps two hundred, for the woods have grown up close all around it. Nobody ever goes there — fact is, I don't believe hardly anybody knows there's such a house on the island; and I cal'late Heffler could land 'em in the cove, and put 'em up at this old place till we had time to finish the job."

"That sounds plausible," answered a younger and more decided voice; "but *I* don't want to take the risk."

"And we will just go about our business every day, *as usual*, and mebbe once a week or so we can take a load — " The first voice was speaking as though the second had not interpolated a protest.

"Do you know what the chances really are?" asked the younger voice, more sharply. "Do you realize that if we are — ?"

"Sh! Sh! Not so loud!" cautioned the drawling tones. "I ain't anxious to have our remarks overheard, not at present. Let's go aft and talk this thing out to a finish."

The pair moved out of speaking distance, and Val arose slowly to a sitting posture. Even by this time he did not feel particularly energetic. Gingerly he felt of a rapidly increasing and extremely painful bump on his forehead.

"What a whopper!" he muttered. "Big as an egg!" And then he stood up. They were at sea, as he had suspected, and heading off shore in a

southeasterly direction. Painfully Val made his way to the starboard side, across a deck unlighted save by the stars, and there, perhaps a mile away, glowed the two beacons on Cape Eastern known as the "Two Lights," while farther astern shone the great light on the "Head," and beyond that the white flash on Ram Island.

"In all my wildest dreams I never expected this to happen to me," he soliloquized, disgustedly. "If I was going to be carried off why couldn't it be on a dandy yacht, instead of one of the smelliest, frowziest, rancidest boats that ever sailed?"

Never before had Val been on a menhaden steamer, but he had been told they had an odor all their own, and now he knew it.

"It smells like seventeen glue factories and a couple of phosphate works combined, and it's a mighty good place to get away from. I'll just hunt up the Captain and see where he's heading for, and what prospect there is of my ever seeing home again."

Thus communing with himself he went forward, and climbed to the wheel-house. The "Dorabelle" was an average specimen of the porgy — just call it "po'gy," everyone else does — steamer, those craft that prowl about the Atlantic coast in summertime in search for the fish known as menhaden, or porgy, or moss-bunker, and, having captured them in their huge nets, or seines, steam away with the catch to some "po'gy factory"

on shore where the oil — for which the fish are particularly noted — is extracted.

The “Dorabelle’s” wheel-house was away forward, set on top of the galley and mess-room. Below decks was the fore-castle for the crew, and aft of this was a stretch of open deck occupying the steamer’s waist, that afforded easy access to the fish tanks below decks, and gave room for the large seine boats and dories and other equipment.

Aft of this open deck were the engine-room and the officers’ quarters. In fact the steamer “sat on her own tail,” as the saying goes, so short was her shaft owing to the nearness of the engines to the propeller.

The wheel-house door was open, and Val stepped quietly in. There was no light except that in the binnacle; but between him and the open windows in front showed the figure of a man at the wheel. As he entered this person turned his head.

“Say, Bob,” he queried, “what do you think of this lay the old man is going on now? I can’t make head nor tail of it; but he’s offered me double pay if I’ll take hold and ask no questions.”

“Guess you’ve made a slight mistake; I’m not the man that you’re looking for,” Val returned; “but tell me where I’ll find the Captain, and you’ll do me a favor.”

“Well, I’m hanged!” exclaimed the helmsman in surprise. “Who are you, anyhow?”

Val explained briefly.

"Is that so? Well, the Cap'n was due to turn in at twelve, but that fire on the steamer kind of woke him up, and you may find him chinning somewhere aft with the mate."

Thanking his informant, Val withdrew and continued his search. Back along the littered deck he went, and as he did so the words of the conversation he had overheard while lying unnoticed on the deck were recalled by the odd question asked by the helmsman. Even now the matter made little impression on his mind, but afterwards he had good reason to remember. The door of the engine-room was open, and just inside a man sat half nodding in a chair.

"The Captain here?"

"Nope!" grunted the fellow, without looking up. "He's in his room."

Continuing his quest unchallenged, Val presently reached an open door leading to what appeared to be a small cabin. He ascended a low step and entered a dingy, ill-smelling room, lighted by a swinging kerosene lamp, and furnished with a table and several chairs; and then that light-headed feeling from which he had so recently recovered assailed him once more. The cabin was deserted, and unnoticed he dropped rather than sat down in a chair and for a few moments everything seemed very hazy. The rumble and vibration of the propeller shaft in

its casing underneath the cabin, the churn of the screw, the throb of the condenser pumps, the occasional clang of the fireman's shovel from the stoke-hole — even that all-pervading odor of stale and rancid fish — all for the moment seemed dim, far-away, and unreal, the dissolving figments of a dream.

Then as he sat slumped down in a big upholstered chair whose coverings were very much out at elbows two persons began talking in an adjoining stateroom. The voices were the same he had recently heard on deck. With the almost involuntary effort Val made to grasp the meaning of what was being said, his mind suddenly cleared and his faculties concentrated themselves.

"Two thousand dollars and rations, that's what Heffler offered me, sure as I set here," said the drawling voice, persuasively. "I'll give you a good slice of it 'sides your reg'lar wages."

"I need the money, and I'll do it," agreed the other, promptly, "but I don't like the looks of the job."

"Well, you needn't worry about that. We ain't going to have no trouble, and it's mighty easy money. And now that's settled, how about that paper?"

"Paper? What do you mean, Captain Field?"

"Well, now, if you ain't got the short memory! I mean that paper you got when you went ashore to-night."

"I'd rather not say anything about it," was the short reply.

"It ain't my nature and disposition to go 'round prying into other folks' business, Mr. Pike. 'Live an' let live' is my motto, allus."

"Then live up to it."

"Still, I also b'lieve," the other continued, easily, "that one good turn deserves another. Why, just you look here: when you come 'round to me last spring down to Rockland high and dry on your uppers and wanted a mate's berth on the 'Dorabelle,' did I hem and haw an' ask you for your pedigree? Not much! I said: 'Pike, I don't care who you be or where you come from, or what you've been doin', if you can hold this job down it's yours.' Now ain't that so?"

"Sure, that's right; but you can bet I've earned every dollar I ever drew on this boat."

"To be sure. I ain't tryin' to belittle your qualifications. However, when my mate goes ashore and keeps his boat from sailin' for two hours while he's chasin' 'round on mysterious errands, and finally comes back with a mob howlin' at his heels and accusin' him of stealin', an' I have to stand 'em off for him, then it's time, thinks I, that an explanation be forthcomin', and a good one, too."

"I'll pay you for that boat. Don't you worry over that."

"That's neither here nor there," cried the Cap-

tain, and he thumped his fist emphatically on the small desk before which he sat. "You can bet I'll get square with someone for that boat; but it'll be them four fresh youngsters that run off with it. But them same fellers accused you of stealin' a valuable paper, and the next time I put into Stroudport like as not you'll be arrested, and I'll be left minus a mate right in the busy season. I cal'late it's up to you to explain what that paper is and let me know just how matters stand."

"The secret isn't mine," objected the mate.

"You look here," the Captain said, in a firmer tone than he had heretofore used. "Don't I know your real name ain't Pike? Don't I know you was mixed up in something crooked last summer? Don't I know you was indicted by the Grand Jury last fall, but never got arrested 'cause the officers couldn't find you, and that indictment's hanging over you now? Well, now, that secret ain't mine, but I know it, just the same. Now you tell me 'bout that paper, for I *know* your pedigree, even if you didn't give it to me."

All of this conversation was perfectly audible to Val, but it carried no particular meaning for him, and having no desire to be an eavesdropper he was about to make his presence known when Pike spoke.

"Will you swear not to try any funny business if I tell you?" was his impatient demand.

"Sartin!"

"Then here's the story. Afterwards I'll show you the paper. Last summer I shipped as deck-hand on a yacht bound east for a cruise —"

"Look here," interrupted his companion, "wa'n't she the 'Sea Rover'?"

The mate paused before replying, while Val Brandon's eyes began to open. He settled back and waited eagerly for the answer. Though Pike's words thus far had been few, yet to Val his voice had sounded familiar.

"I won't deny it," was the response that came presently. "But I want you to distinctly understand I didn't know anything about the insurance fraud when I took the job, and when I found it out it was too late to back out."

"Just so," was the good-humored rejoinder. "I understand you. We're allus innocent, ain't we? Leastways till we get indicted." He chuckled loudly; but the mate saw fit to disregard this allusion and resumed his story.

"You probably read in the papers about what happened on the 'Sea Rover,' for it all came out at the trial of those fellows; but one thing wasn't mentioned. While Jones was sailing around on the sloop-yacht 'Spitfire' with young Parker, trying to make Tower Island and get back to the gang, somehow he got hold of a curious old paper."

"What kind of a paper, and where'd he get it?"

“It was dug up on Stone Horse Island, down near Codville; but just *what* it is I don't know. Now last spring I got word from Jones in prison that he wanted to see me; so as I had grown a beard then and wasn't afraid of being recognized I went over to Thomaston and had a talk with him. He wanted me to go to Stroudport and find the 'Spitfire.' He told me about this paper, and that he hid it on the sloop last summer. Said that lately he had been thinking about it a good deal and wanted me to get it and smuggle it in to him. He told me, too, whereabouts on the yacht I would find a key to the companion padlock.

“To-night I found the yacht anchored up in Stroudport, went aboard, found the key and got in, and sure enough there was the paper just where he hid it last year. But before I got away those fellows took after me, and I had a deuce of a time giving them the slip.”

“Guess I know somethin' about that part, myself. Le's see the paper.”

The mate evidently produced the document, for there was no conversation for a few moments — only the rustle of parchment as the Captain and Pike bent their heads together over it in wondering scrutiny. In the cabin, only a few feet removed from the unsuspecting pair, sat Val with his nerves atingle. He did not understand who “those fellows” were who had chased Pike, but



“THE MATE EVIDENTLY PRODUCED THE DOCUMENT.”

the rest of the narrative was clear. Clearest of all was the fact that the cipher taken by force from Sumner and his two companions had been found and was in the hands of the master and mate of the "Dorabelle." Debating what steps to take he awaited their next words. By right the paper belonged to the trio who had dug it up; but it was idle to suppose these men would let it go without a struggle.

"That's the comicallest appearin' thing I ever saw," declared the Captain, presently. "What does Jones think it is?"

"You must understand that he wasn't taking me into partnership on this," was the reply. "I was doing it as a favor, and he didn't tell me any more than he had to. Then again I guess it's as big a puzzle to him as it looks to us; but reading between the lines, as you might say, I believe he thinks it's the key to hidden treasure. What do you make of it?"

"Well, if you put it up to me, I'll admit right off I'm somewhat up a stump," was the candid reply. "Them pictures on top there — the tower, the horse and the whale —"

"Whale? Is that a whale?"

"Sure it's a whale; did you think that was a fish? And you the mate of a po'gy boat," chuckled Field. "Now them pictures is plain to me. I s'pose the horse stands for Stone Horse Island where the document was

found. Now do these other pictures mean islands, too? ”

“ Look here! ” said Pike quickly. “ There’s a Tower Island and a Whale Island down eastward as well as a Stone Horse Island; and besides, look on your chart and you’ll find that those three islands form the three points of a triangle, just about as the pictures do on this paper: Whale Island at the top, or north; Stone Horse at the west, or lower left-hand corner; and Tower at the eastward, or lower right-hand corner.”

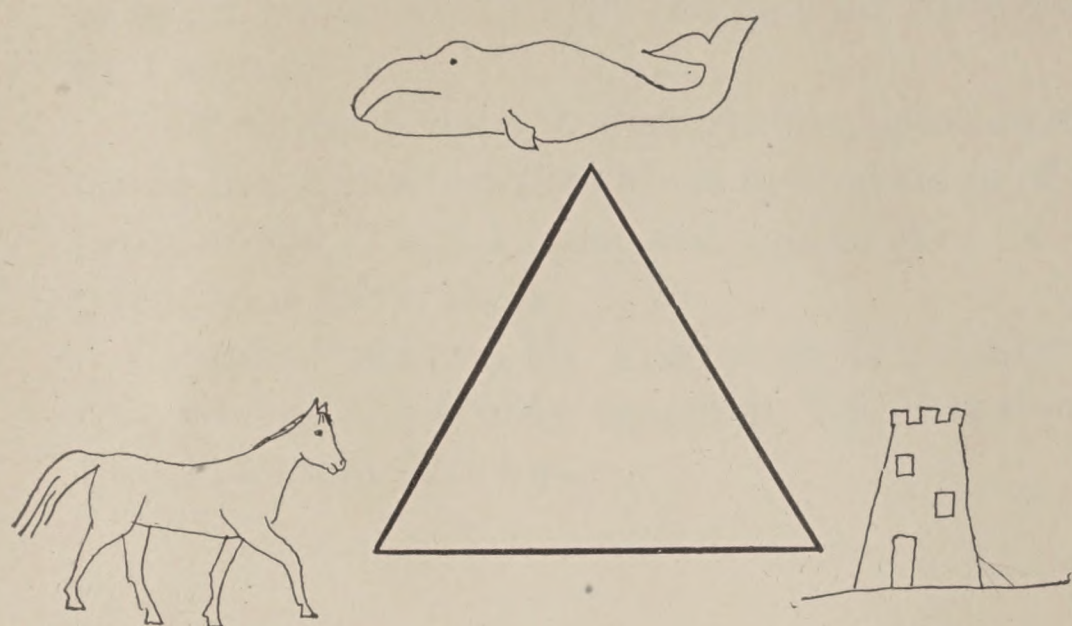
“ You’re right! Now see here,” and the Captain’s voice took on a very eager note, “ let’s you and me form a close partnership and dig this thing out. This paper don’t reely belong to Jones, anyhow. He stole it, didn’t he? Well, then, we’ll put our heads together and find out what it means, and if there’s any treasure on the coast of Maine lyin’ ’round loose, we’ll take the old ‘ Dorabelle ’ and go and nail it. What do you say? ”

“ Say? I say yes! ”

“ Then it’s a bargain,” said the Captain in a gratified voice. “ Now let’s see what we can make of them pothooks.”

“ They’re a puzzle.”

“ Do you know what they put me in mind of? ” said the Captain, enthusiastically. “ Blamed if they don’t look some like the pricemarks I used



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CIPHER FOUND ON STONE HORSE ISLAND.

to mark goods with in my old general store down to Castine."

"Of course I hate to disturb you, gentlemen," broke in a quiet but firm voice at this stage of the proceedings, "but I must ask you to give me the paper you have there."

Captain Field and Mr. Pike arose as if electrified to confront the sturdy figure of Val Brandon in the stateroom doorway.

CHAPTER VII

VAL MAKES A COMPROMISE

“WHERE in creation did you come from?” demanded Captain Field, surveying Val Brandon in unmistakable surprise. “Who are you, anyhow, and how long have you been here?”

He held the cipher clutched tightly in one hand, and his final words took on something of beligerency. As for the mate, a startled look of recognition crossed his features, but he quickly repressed it and sank back in his chair, leaving the conversation to the Captain.

“I know who you be,” declared that person vigorously. “You’re Carroll Morse. Now where’s the rest of your valiant band that came out and stole my boat to-night? Trot ’em in here and we’ll settle this business right off. I never expected to be overhauled and boarded on the high seas by one of them harbor buzz-tanks; but now you’re here bring on the rest of the crowd and we’ll try to git satisfaction somehow.”

“You may know what you’re talking about, Captain, but I surely don’t,” replied Val, mystified

by this harangue. "I'm one of the men you took off the burning steamer, and you can bet I'm very grateful to you for doing it."

The master of the "Dorabelle" lost a little of his warlike aspect.

"Oh, that's all right — that's all right," he replied. "Why, you couldn't expect me to let you burn up, now could you?" in a deprecatory tone. "But I put you fellers all ashore at Cushman Island. How come it you stayed aboard here?"

Val explained his continued presence on the steamer, and for proof called attention to the bump on his head.

"How long you been in here?"

"About ten minutes, for a guess; but I felt pretty dizzy at the first of it, and it may have been longer."

"Who are you, anyhow?" was the next ungracious question.

"My name is Brandon, and I live in Stroudport."

"Guess I don't know you."

"That's of no consequence. I don't know you either, but I do know something about that paper."

"So you've been eavesdroppin', have you?" the Captain queried angrily.

"Not intentionally at first," was Val's reply. "But when I found you were talking about

something that closely concerned me and some of my friends, why, I listened, up to the moment I interrupted you."

"Well, what do you know about this?" and Captain Field indicated the cipher, but a scowl wrinkled his forehead, and he looked far from pleasant.

"Now look here, Captain," said Val, decidedly, "I am under great obligations to you for taking me off the 'Bay Queen,' and I cheerfully acknowledge it; but that paper is another matter. I'm willing to talk it over reasonably with you, but if you are going to get cranky I warn you I can put up as big a fuss as you can."

"You little bantam —" began the Captain; but the mate interrupted.

"Take my advice and talk it over with him."

"What, do you know this feller?" demanded Field, in much surprise.

"Of course he knows me," broke in Val. "He got mighty well acquainted with me last summer."

"Friend of his, be you?"

"Not much! The last time I met Mr. Pike — who by the way has changed his name since then — there was a sort of truce between us for mutual protection; but before that we were rather active enemies. Isn't that so, Mr. — ah — Pike?"

"I'd rather not discuss that matter here, if it's all the same to you," returned the mate, shortly. "Let's settle this cipher business."

"I ain't much good at riddles," the Captain declared, "so we'd better leave ancient history alone. But just set down, Mr. Brandon, and tell us what rights you figger you have in this here document?"

Field reseated himself at his desk, and Val took the chair indicated.

"I have no personal rights in it, but as it belongs to three friends of mine I claim it on their account."

"Who be they?"

"Their names are Parker, Hilton and Strodder; but that's neither here nor there. The main point is this: that paper is stolen property, and if you persist in keeping it you're liable to arrest and prosecution."

"Well, that don't skeer *me* much," grunted the Captain. "How do I know you ain't lying?"

"Your mate knows," replied Val, instantly. "He knows that Parker and his friends found that paper. He knows that Jones stole it from them and hid it on my yacht, the 'Spitfire.' Don't you, Mr. — ah — Pike?"

"Why, I hear you say so," was Pike's evasive answer, which aroused Val's latent spirit.

"I have no quarrel with either of you," he declared, "least of all over a piece of musty parchment that may not be worth the snap of a finger. But one thing is dead sure: if you don't give me that paper peaceably now, I'll see that

the indictment against Pike — alias Fenderson — is made effective; and as for you, Captain Field, I'll take good care to tip you off to the proper authorities, and have them keep an eye on you."

For a full minute after Val delivered this ultimatum neither the Captain nor the mate said a word. They gazed at each other in some perturbation.

At length the mate broke the silence.

"You'd better give it to him," said he.

"Well, I'd just like to know why?" the Captain demanded. "Do you think I'm going to jump the first time somebody comes along and hollers 'Boo!' at me?"

"We'll never get rid of him any other way," asserted Pike. "You don't know this fellow's disposition, but I have good reason to. He's one of the boys that Bangs took to Tower Island last summer on the 'Sea Rover,' and he did more than anybody else to make that scheme fall through."

Apparently this declaration impressed the Captain, yet he was very loth to give up the cipher just when he was becoming so interested in it.

"I'll let ye have it," he finally agreed, "on one condition."

"What is that?"

"You'll have to give me a copy of it."

And on this point he was firm. No amount of argument, no threats that Val could make,

would budge him a hair. On the contrary he declared that if Val would not give him a copy he would be put ashore without any cipher at all.

"And you can go to thunder with your United States officers and indictments, and be darned," he concluded, with emphasis.

Now all of this time Captain Roderick's revolver was reposing in one of Val Brandon's hip pockets. It was loaded, and Val had by no means forgotten its presence. Very likely by displaying it he might overawe his two companions and force them to surrender the cipher; but after that? He had no idea how many men there were aboard the "Dorabelle," and in spite of the revolver they would probably be able to take him unawares in some way, and he would find himself in a worse situation than at present.

"Half a loaf is better than no bread," he thought.

So he agreed to the proposal. Paper and pen and ink were produced and Val sat down at the captain's desk. There, while Field and Pike watched his every pen-stroke with keenly critical eyes, he copied the odd characters of the parchment. Each vertical line and each cross line was scrupulously imitated, as well as the triangle and the three rude pictures at its points. When he had finished, his companions carefully compared the copy with the original, and the Captain,

apparently satisfied, gave Val the parchment and put the other in his pocket.

“That’s done,” he said, with an air of relief, “and now if there’s any value in them pot-hooks the first one that finds it out’s the best feller. Ain’t that so?”

“That’s it, exactly,” answered Val. “If it means anything, the first man on the spot gets the goods; but it’s no fool job to solve that cipher. I tried all last winter to puzzle one out, and I haven’t done it yet.”

“You mean to say you’ve seen this document before?” queried the Captain in surprise. “Then what makes you so anxious to get —”

“Oh, no. But I have another cipher that looks very much like this one, and may be based on the same key; but it’s different. The characters are not arranged the same.”

“Well, I want to know? Where’d you git it?”

“Found it on Tower Island last summer.”

“Ain’t got it with you, have you?”

“No.”

“Well, some things is mighty surprising in these days when you expect everything to be purty humdrum; but our business is closed and I reckon you’re thinking about getting ashore. About three o’clock in the morning, if nothing breaks down, we’ll land you at the iron pier at Old Orchard. They tell me that po’gies is runnin’ in Saco Bay, and that’s where we’re headin’.”

Val expressed his satisfaction with this arrangement.

"There's just one thing I want of Mr. Pike before we go," he added.

"What's that?" asked that person quickly, and in a tone of apprehension.

"That key to the 'Spitfire's' companion."

Pike handed it over with a short laugh.

"'Twon't be any further use to me, but I'd like to have a word with you in private on deck if the Captain don't mind," he said. He led Val out to a secluded spot aft, and began an anxious argument.

"Now tell me, are you going to give me away to the officers?" he demanded. "I want you to understand, Mr. Brandon, that I have suffered for getting mixed up in that 'Sea Rover' affair last summer. After I left the yacht when she ran ashore on Whale Island it was a hardscrabble for mine, all right, sleeping out-doors, and living on clams and blueberries. Nothing like clams and blueberries to make a fellow homesick."

"How did you get away?" Val asked.

"After awhile I found the village at the north end of the island — they call it Cheney Landing — and shipped for Philadelphia on a stone barge. At Philadelphia I struck a piece of luck and got a berth as mate on a four-master. We went to Florida and came back to New York with lumber;

and then got a charter to go to the Gulf and carry coal from Pensacola, Florida, to Tampico, down in Mexico, all winter."

"So that's what became of you," mused Val. "I often wondered how you managed to disappear so completely."

"That's the way; but when spring came we ran around to Fernandina and loaded a cargo of railroad ties for Stroudport. Of course I didn't feel anxious to get back to Maine, for I knew that everyone but the crazy engineer, Marshall, and myself were in State's prison."

"Where is Marshall now? Do you know?"

"Why, sure. He's in the asylum at Augusta. Didn't you know that? But I don't think the officers know it's Marshall, the old engineer of the 'Sea Rover,' that is shut up in the nut factory. As near as I can find out he lived in an old hut down on Whale Island till he got so crazy the people wouldn't have him 'round, and they shipped him to Augusta, though they didn't know his name."

"Well, what happened to you after you reached Stroudport?"

"We got a charter to go to Bangor and load ice for Washington; but we never got there. We were running up toward Penobscot Bay as nice as you please, when we struck a sunken derelict that knocked a fearful hole in our bow. We managed to put one boat over and get into

it before the schooner sunk. We were all safe, but we didn't save anything. Then the steamer 'Ransom B. Fuller' picked us up and landed us at Rockland. And there I was, stranded, without a cent, for I lost all my money when the schooner went down, and had only the clothes on my back left.

"Then I met Captain Field, here, and now you see me, mate of the 'Dorabelle.' But this hard-luck business has nothing to do with last summer. Many a time have I cursed the day I heard of Bangs and the 'Sea Rover.' I had no interest in their plot; but just got caught in it. I think I have suffered enough, don't you? And I want to know this: are you going to send me travelling again, or not?"

Val pondered the matter some moments before making reply. This was an aspect of the case that he had not considered.

"You put me in a hard place," he finally said. "How can I make myself a judge of the rights and wrongs of this matter? Why shouldn't the courts do that? But, on the other hand," he continued, "you took my side against that crazy man Marshall when he ran away with the 'Sea Rover,' and put me under obligation to you to that extent.

"This is what I'll do; I'll talk the whole business over with a much wiser person than I am — my father — and what he advises I will do. But,

anyhow, I'll write you our decision before we do anything."

"Send your letter to 'Charles Pike, Cheney Landing, Whale Island, Maine,'" said the mate, "and don't send me off on the tramp again."

It was nearly three o'clock in the morning when the "Dorabelle" steamed slowly up to the outer end of the long iron pier at Old Orchard. All was dark on the pier, and as the steamer had no searchlight she proceeded with much caution.

"Plenty of water here," said Val, as he stood near the Captain in the bow trying to see ahead, while that worthy occasionally gave an order to the man in the pilot-house. "Eighteen feet at low tide, but it's on the flow now."

"Oh, I ain't afraid about the water. I just don't want to knock the pier over," was the bantering reply. "It got blowed away once, you know — a piece of it — and I ain't going to stand for no damage suits."

After some nosing around the "Dorabelle" made fast, and Val was about to climb up on the pier when Field placed a detaining hand on his shoulder.

"What's your rush?" he asked. "You can't get a train to Stroudport for some hours yit. What I want to say to you is this: Don't you go to luggin' ashore no wrong ideas about *me* — that's what I want to impress on your mind." He spoke with much earnestness.

"Now of course I don't exactly know what you may have overheard me and Pike talkin' about here before you made yourself known," he continued, "but no matter what it was, it was all honest and above board, so fur as the law is concerned. In the po'gy business it's first come first served, and we 'casionally cut sharp corners to git there early; but I cal'late we know enough to steer clear of the law."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Captain, and I'll try to remember it, and what was it," — ventured Val, as he set foot on the pier steps — "what was it you said about pricemarks?"

"Nothin'! Nothin' at all!" was the stout reply. "There ain't a thing in it!"

With this parting shot fired after him Val climbed to the planking above, while the fishing steamer cast off her line and moved slowly away. And I feel quite sure that if at this juncture Val Brandon could have foreseen the results that were to come from his telling Captain Field about the Tower Island cipher, he would have felt just like kicking himself the entire length of that long pier.

But to that indiscretion he gave no thought as he walked shoreward. Despite the weariness coming from a night of no rest and much excitement, Val found himself pondering once more the subject of the mysterious ciphers.

He had worked enthusiastically, even feverishly

at times, trying to extract the meaning of the Tower Island cipher, but in vain, till gradually he had given it up as a hopeless case. Now, however, the chance recovery of the other cipher, so similar to his own and yet with apparently a different meaning, stirred again his interest. He was anxious to get home and compare this new acquisition with the other; and, further, he wanted to find out about pricemarks. That remark of Captain Field had roused his curiosity. What there might be in pricemarks that could solve the ciphers he couldn't say. His own knowledge of such things was vague. He merely knew that merchants marked their goods with secret symbols that told to the initiated the cost and the selling price; but he determined to leave no stone unturned in his efforts, and pricemarks seemed to be one of the "stones."

Val slept soundly for three hours on a cot provided by an accommodating night-clerk at a near-by hotel, rose at six, called his father at home on the long-distance telephone and told him where he had been, and boarded the first train for Stroudport with a copy of the *Stroudport News* in his hand.

"Anything about the 'Bay Queen,' I wonder?" he mused, as he sat down and opened the sheet, and then his face suddenly flushed. It was not every day that a steamer blew up and burned in Stroudport Bay, and the *News* reporters had made

the most of it. Glaring headlines gave the salient points, and finer type the details.

“Steamer Bay Queen Blows Up and Burns! Two hundred persons in deadly peril! Courageous work of crew and volunteers!”

Then followed a detailed account of the catastrophe, from which Val learned the identity of the young men in the motor-boat. It also stated that only the upper works of the steamer were consumed, as the fire-boat had arrived in time to save the hull. There were numerous stories of “personal experience of survivors” in which the grit and presence of mind of Captain Roderick were highly praised; but it remained for the Captain himself to cap the climax in the interview he gave the reporters. Undoubtedly he had stuck to the facts as he knew them, but the *News* man had given his imagination free rein, for he devoted a lot of space to the exploits of “Percival Brandon of Stroudport, the volunteer pilot, who, while flames were bursting out beneath him, bravely stuck to his post in the wheelhouse and steered the burning steamer for the shoals of Jackson Island.”

It also detailed how, after the stopping of the machinery had rendered the wheel useless, the same Brandon had “gone fearlessly among the frenzied passengers and calmed their fears,” and then had led a volunteer force in launching the life-boats.

It made Val feel foolish.

“ I call that the limit! ” he remarked to himself as he stepped off the train in the Stroudport station; and then, turning, he found himself looking into the face of Alf Richardson.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE TRACK

ALTHOUGH Alf Richardson had scarcely closed his eyes at all during the night just passed yet he looked as fresh and jaunty as one could wish.

"You're just the fellow I want to see," exclaimed Val Brandon as the two came face to face.

"Halloo, you volunteer pilot and general all-round hero!" was the lively response, as Alf gripped his hand and pumped it vigorously. "How does it feel to be famous?"

"If I'd had any idea you were coming into town on this train — and I'll be hanged if I can understand where you are coming from anyhow — you'd have been welcomed by a brass band and the mayor and the militia and the High School Cadets!" declared Alf, in a breath.

"Much obliged!" laughed Val; "but I notice they didn't leave you altogether in the rear when the bouquets were handed out."

"Not on your life! They excavated a little niche in the hall of fame and poked me into it, along with the other fellows on the 'Ginger.' But

I tell you, Val Brandon, that for downright excitement that fire last night beat anything I ever saw or dreamed of. The way Captain Roderick handed those folks down to us and we passed 'em along to the other boats was a caution. Women screaming, and women crying, and women as cool as you please, coming down into the 'Ginger' in droves, while the Captain held those men back with his revolver. Oh, it was great! And the fire roaring and bursting out of the engine-room windows, while we four fellows were almost crazy with the excitement of it all!"

"Sit down here and tell me something," requested Val, finally, after the incidents of the fire had received several minutes' consideration. "Now tell me what you know about pricemarks," he continued, after they were seated in the depot waiting room. "You work for a hardware concern, and they must have 'em."

"Can't do it, old man," said Alf, briefly.

"The dickens you can't! Why not?"

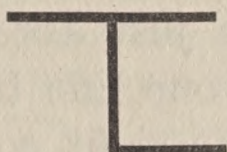
"It's a secret."

"Fudge! I don't want you to reveal any trade mysteries; just give me a little idea of the systems of pricemarks that are used."

"Oh, is that all?" said Alf, with his eyes twinkling. "Well, then, you just take a word of ten letters — no two alike — and let the letters stand for the ten numerals from one up to nought; then when you mark your goods you use the letters

that stand for the figures instead of the figures themselves."

"I've heard about that method. But tell me, Alf, did you ever see this sort of a price-mark?" and Val drew on the margin of his newspaper a character that looked like this:



"Sure thing," was the prompt reply. "My people don't use that system, but I know some concerns that do. That means '7,' or maybe '5.'"

"Seven, or five? Well, how do you make it?"

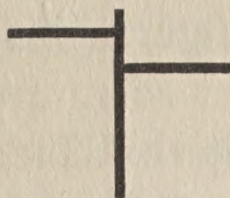
"Dead easy when you know how. Now you start with a vertical line like this:



"Now that vertical line has no value; but when you draw a line from it to the left, like this:



that line means one; and when you draw a line to the right, so fashion:



it adds three, making the whole amount to four. That is, each line drawn to the left counts one, and each line to the right counts three. So you see that what you just asked me about counts seven, for there is one line to the left, counting one, and two to the right counting three apiece, which makes seven in all. Do you get me? ”

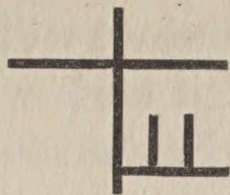
“ Yes, that seems very simple.”

“ Why, of course, a mere child can operate it,” laughed Alf. “ And you can vary the system by giving different values to the horizontal lines; for instance, you can call the lines to the left three, and those to the right one. That will make your drawing count five instead of seven. See? ”

“ And you can hitch these horizontal lines on to the vertical one anywhere you please? ”

“ Yep. Top, bottom, or middle, it makes no difference; but the value never runs higher than nine; for when you run up to ten or more, you use a character for each digit, just the same as in numbers.”

“ I understand; but see here, Alf,” questioned Val, with increasing earnestness, “ tell me, if you can, what this means.” He made the following character on the newspaper:



"I'm poor on Chinese laundry marks," protested his companion. "One shirtee, two cuff, four collah, maybe, perhaps, I don't think."

"Oh, no."

"Well, have it your own way. It's no price-mark I ever saw. What is it?"

"I don't know, but I'm trying to find out. Much obliged to you, Alf, and so long. I'm off for home and the breakfast table."

Val found little time at breakfast for eating, owing to the numerous questions of his father and mother regarding the fire. They had not worried over his absence, since business occasionally took him away from home over night, and the first inkling they had received of the disaster to the "Bay Queen" was when the morning paper had been left at the door.

As soon as opportunity afforded Val brought up the subject of the mate of the "Dorabelle," Pike, alias Fenderson.

"You can't assume the responsibility of deciding such a question," declared his father at once. "Don't you see, if you know the whereabouts of this fellow and keep quiet about it, you make yourself an accessory? But there's one thing we can do. I am well acquainted with the

County Attorney, and we will write him the story as we know it, and if he is willing to discontinue the case against Fenderson — ‘quash the indictment,’ as they term it — the Judge will probably do it on his recommendation. He has caught and sent to prison all the big fish in that case, and very likely he would be willing to let the matter drop, if he knew the real facts about Fenderson.”

The upshot of this talk was that Mr. Brandon wrote the details of the matter to the County Attorney, but before the latter had taken any steps toward discontinuing the case something else came up involving the mate of the “Dora-belle” that entirely eclipsed it.

Val hustled to the office that morning as soon as possible. As he rode downtown on the trolley-car one or two ideas that he had been turning over in his mind gradually took coherent form, and he mapped out a definite scheme for attacking the secret of the two ciphers.

Val was the private secretary to Mr. Culberson, the State Manager for the Liberty Mutual Life Insurance Company. On this day the Manager was in Lewiston, but Val found plenty of work on hand. He disposed of the routine correspondence, brought the Manager’s private books up to date, and having thus cleared the calendar of the daily work, he ascertained that the “Storm King” had got in the evening before, succeeded in locat-

ing Carroll on the telephone after a good deal of effort, and requested him to come with Sumner to the office by three o'clock that afternoon.

"You fellows be sure to be on hand, for I expect to have something to show you that will make your eyes bulge out!" said he, as the conversation ended.

Then seating himself at his desk in the private sanctum of the Agency he produced the two ciphers and spread them out in front of him.

"Now, you old fossils," he declared, as he sharpened a pencil, "we're going to have a fresh wrassle with you in a brand new way." And with a figuring pad at his elbow he proceeded to put his latest theory to the test. Minutes passed in earnest endeavor, while thoughtful wrinkles corrugated his brow as he concentrated his mind on the difficult task. He was thus engaged when the door opened abruptly, and Carroll and Sumner rushed in.

Val promptly swept the ciphers and all other evidence of his work into a drawer, and rose to greet his chums. There was enough to talk about, for the trip to Philadelphia on the tug and the entire detail of the "Bay Queen" fire had to be gone over with great minuteness, so they sat down and went at it.

"And those four boats from the steamer leaked like sieves," declared Carroll, finally.

"All the poor ladies had very wet feet before

they landed at Jackson Island," Sumner corroborated. "But perhaps we fellows on the 'Ginger' didn't have the time of our lives! But there — oh, I say, Val," and Sumner's usually breezy manner became very much subdued, for he pulled his chair nearer to the young secretary's desk, mopped a perspiring forehead — it was a warm day — and continued dolefully: "Val, we've found it, and lost it again. It's gone — gone for good, and we are a great big bunch of chumps!"

"It's very hard for me to believe you," replied Val, in mock sympathy. "Try to bear up under the blow. What is gone for good?"

"I say," demanded Sumner, "why didn't we ever think to go out to the 'Spitfire' and hunt to see if Jones didn't hide that Stone Horse Island cipher on board? Tell me, why didn't we?"

"Hunt on the 'Spitfire' for the Stone Horse Island cipher?" repeated Val. "What's the matter with you? I've hunted that yacht from end to end at least half a dozen times for that very thing; but it wasn't there."

"You never told me about it," in an aggrieved tone.

"I knew that if I couldn't find it you couldn't, so what was the use? But what do you mean by 'something being gone for good?'"

"He means the Stone Horse Island cipher," said Carroll.

"Well, of course it's gone," and Val pretended

impatience. "Jones stole it last summer. What are you rattling all these dry bones for, anyhow?"

"Because Cal and I found the cipher."

"Come, wake up; it's morning, Sum. You're having a dream!"

"No sir! At any rate we found out where it was just in time to see it go."

"Tell us about it," requested Val. And between them Sumner and Carroll detailed the incidents connected with the search for the cipher, and the pursuit of the intruder on the "Spitfire," carrying the narrative up to the moment of the discovery of trouble on the "Bay Queen."

"That explains why Captain Field called me Carroll Morse; and I also understand why he was somewhat warm under the collar at you fellows," remarked Val, as he opened a drawer and produced the Tower Island cipher.

"Would you know that cipher if you saw it again?" he asked. "Is this it?"

"Sure I would," said Sumner, promptly. "No; that's your cipher."

"Then is it this one?" and Val smilingly spread before them another parchment that very much resembled the first. His companions gazed at it in open-mouthed perplexity.

"Where — where on earth did you get *that*, Val Brandon?" they both asked, at the same time.

"From Captain Field and his mate Pike on the po'gy steamer 'Dorabelle' at about one o'clock this morning, somewhere between the 'Two Lights' and Old Orchard pier," and Val rapidly outlined the adventures that befell him after leaving the burning steamer.

"And you gave them a copy of it?" asked Sumner, grudgingly.

"Had to, Sum. It was the only bargain I could drive. But here's the best news of all. I've got a clue to the meaning! Draw your chairs close, and listen hard."

The trio gathered about Val's desk, and that young man proceeded to tell some of his ideas about the deciphering of cryptograms.

"Now, fellows, we've done a lot of work on this Tower Island document, and we always landed just where we started.

"The weak point of most kinds of cryptograms is that the frequent repetition of the letters gives a clue to the meaning. Now we know that 'E' is the commonest letter, so by counting up the character most used in a cryptogram, we decide that stands for 'E.' 'A,' 'O,' 'N' and 'I' come next, and so on. Then we find that all words of a single letter must be either 'A,' 'I' or 'O,' and the most frequent double letters are 'EE,' 'OO,' 'FF,' 'LL,' and 'SS.' There are a lot of other things like this that can be applied to solving the ordinary forms of cipher, for in this

way the letter of the secret message can be classified."

"That's the method Poe used to solve his famous cipher," said Carroll.

"And Conan Doyle made Sherlock Holmes apply the same rules to the dancing men cipher," returned Val, "but it won't work with either of ours."

"That's right," Sumner corroborated, "because there's no two characters alike, and everything runs together. It's all one long word."

Carroll examined both ciphers and found this to be true of each.

"The captain of the po'gy steamer put an idea into my head about this thing," said Val, "though he tried afterwards to knock it out again," and he explained what he had learned about price-marks.

"I believe that each of these marks has a numerical value, and assume that this value corresponds to the position of some letter as it occurs in regular order in the alphabet. That is, A is one, B is two, C is three, and so on. Before you fellows came I was working along on this scheme; but the difficult thing is to find what value to give to the different kinds of lines that each character has, and you can only find out by trying over and over. Here is an alphabet table I made up," and he produced the following:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	

“So you understand,” said Val, smiling at his intensely interested audience, “by this scheme a character that has the value of one will mean A, and so on. One whose value is five will stand for E.

“I have tried several values on these lines, but nothing came of it but a jumble of letters that didn’t mean anything. Now let’s get busy and try another combination. Say we assume that the vertical line is only a base line and has no value — for you see there is no character in either cipher but has more than the vertical line — let each line to the right count one, each line to the left, three; each short vertical line upward five; and each one downward ten. Now then, we’re off. You take the alphabet table, Sum, and Cal and I will count up on the cipher.”

“Lordy,” muttered Sumner, “we may have to try a small million of combinations before we hit anything.”

“You’re dead right,” Carroll said, “but there’s no other way to get at it that I can see. Go ahead, I’m getting nervous.”

“Say, fellows, that combination won’t work,”

declared Sumner, who had been looking over Val's shoulder at the cipher. "According to your scheme the highest value should be twenty-six for Z, but here's a lot with three or more short vertical marks downward, which would count up thirty and over. You're straining the alphabet, fellows."

"That's right, too," agreed Val, after a moment's study. "Then let's give all the short verticals the same value of five, whether they run up or down."

"That'll be much better," Carroll commented. "Now for the first one."

"It has five lines to the left, making fifteen; three to the right, making three, and one vertical at five — total 23."

"Which means W," said Sumner, setting it down on a pad. "Next!"

"The next has two lines to the left, making 6; one to the right making 1, and two verticals, 10. Total 17."

"And that's Q," which Sumner put down on the pad next to the W.

"Wrong tack, fellows — we're on the wrong tack," declared Carroll, glancing at Sumner's pad. "Who ever heard of a word beginning with WQ?"

"Let me tell you, Cal Morse," retorted Sumner, with mock asperity, "when you pass away, all knowledge won't perish from the earth, if you are going to college."

"Oh, very well," was Carroll's unruffled reply.
"Try another, then, and be convinced."

"The next has three lines to the left, 9; one to right, 1; three verticals, 15; total 25."

"In other words, Y," and Sumner put that on the pad, while Carroll's face wore an amused smile.

"Next has two lines to left, 6; one to right, 1; three verticals, 15; total 22."

Sumner set down a V.

"W-Q-Y-V," read Carroll, aloud. "Now will you believe me? This is no good; let's try another set of values."

"All right," Sumner reluctantly conceded, "or else try this one on the other cipher. Now perhaps they aren't alike."

"Try the Stone Horse Island cipher," said Val, "and come back to this later. Here we go: the first character has two lines to the left, 6; one to right, 1; making 7."

"G," announced Sumner.

"Next has four to left, 12; and three to right, 3, making 15."

"O," put down Sumner.

"Now that looks O.K.," remarked Carroll.
"Give us another."

"One to left, 3; two to right, 2; three verticals, 15; total 20."

And Sumner added a T to the GO.

The next four characters were treated in

like manner, and at the end the pad showed this:

“G O T H R E E .”

“Now what does ‘gothree’ mean?” asked Sumner.

“It means: ‘Go three,’” cried Val, suddenly, while a look of great delight illumined his face. “By ginger, fellows! we’ve got it at last! We’ve got it at last!” And yielding to the excitement of the moment he seized his companions and they executed an impromptu dance around the office.

When at last the jubilant trio got down to business again, amid excitement but illy repressed they worked out the following from the cipher found on Stone Horse Island:

“G O T H R E E H U N D R E D A N D
T W E N T Y F R O M O N S H O R E O F
I S L A N D A N D B O X B E N E A T H .”

This jumble of letters after a little consideration was resolved into the following words:

“Go three hundred and twenty from on shore of island and box beneath.”

“Now what do you glean from that mess?” asked Carroll, as they gazed with puzzled eyes at the words that Val had written out.

“Three hundred and twenty *what?*” Sumner demanded. “Feet, yards, rods?”

“What island, too?” continued Val. “And what is the box beneath?”

For several moments they sat silent, racking their brains for the meaning of the cipher’s translation, which seemed but a degree less baffling than had the cipher itself.

“It’s not complete,” declared Carroll, presently. “There are words missing, I’ll bet.”

“I think I see a light,” interposed Val, at this point, and the others turned eagerly to him.

“Now, just supposing,” he went on, “this cipher gives the clue to the hiding place of treasure, or anything else —”

“Treasure, of course,” averred Sumner, stoutly.

“—there are several factors to be considered. First, we have to know the point from which the clue starts; secondly, the direction to be taken from the starting point; thirdly, the distance; and fourthly, what sort of a hiding place to look for.

“Now this translation doesn’t give any of these things at all definitely, so, as Cal says, there must be words missing; and until we know what they are and where they fit in, we are just as badly off as before.”

“Then let’s dig at the Tower Island cipher,” advised Sumner, “for I’ll bet a cent that’ll tell us just what we want to know.”

“Reverse the values we used on this cipher, and try them on the other,” suggested Carroll.

"Let each line to the left count one, each line to the right count three; but let the verticals count five, the same as before."

And so they went at it, carefully but eagerly, forgetful of supertime; thinking of nothing but their determination to drag from those old parchments the last vestige of meaning they possessed. Taking the values suggested by Carroll the first letter set down on Sumner's pad was S. Then followed O-U-T-H-W-E-S-T.

"Southwest!" cried Val, ecstatically. "Boys, we're on the right track again!"

Half an hour of ardent labor produced the following as the translation of the Tower Island cipher:

"Southwest paces cross eastern whale find tilting rock."

"Now," said Val, when this result had been reached, "here are some words that look mighty promising. Let's see if they will fit into the other translation and make the meaning complete."

To make a long story short, the words of the second translation fitted with great nicety into certain places of the first, and when finally the boys had adjusted things to their satisfaction, the combination of words read as follows:

"Go southwest three hundred and twenty paces from cross on eastern shore of Whale Island and find box beneath tilting rock."

I will not attempt to follow out the thread of

the conversation, long and excited, that ensued after the solving of the two ciphers. When at last the meeting broke up reluctantly — for it was long past supper time — it was determined that Jim Hilton and Professor Strodder should be invited to go on the expedition to Whale Island, that, in fact, they were entitled to the privilege. Further than this, Val had declared his purpose to try and get Captain Roderick's motor-boat "Screamer" to make the trip, and let the sloop "Spitfire" stay at her anchorage. Sumner was detailed to write Jim Hilton, and as no one of them knew the professor's address, Sumner was also to ask Jim to pass the word along to him.

"Boys," said Val, decisively, as they finally separated, "remember, mum's the word. Don't breathe a word of this to anyone but your own people, and make them cross their throats," he warned. "Just as soon as we can get our little band together we'll run down to Whale Island and find that box under the tilting rock."

However, Sumner did not go home at once even though he was hungry. He hurried to the telegraph office and wired a long message, charges collect, to Jim Hilton, in Burlington, Vermont.

"It's so much cheaper to send telegrams collect," mused Sumner as he frowned thoughtfully over the yellow blank, "and Jim will be so tickled

to hear the good news that he won't mind the expense."

The telegram read as follows:

"Ciphers solved. Expedition starts for Penobscot Bay at once. Notify Professor Strodder and come as soon as you can with your camping clothes. Going on motor-boat. SUMNER."

"Lordy, but that's a big sight easier than writing letters, besides saving expense," muttered Sumner, with a sigh of relief, as he turned the message over to the clerk, "and I'll bet it'll open his eyes, as well as his wallet."

About ten o'clock the next forenoon Sumner discovered Jim was getting back at him with his own game. A telegram arrived for Sumner with charges due of over two dollars.

"Great Scott, he's sent me a *letter*," he groaned, as he drew upon his stock of spending money to meet the bill.

This was Jim's reply:

"Hurrah! Glad to hear the good news!" "Of course he is," grumbled Sumner, "and he might know I'd know it without making me pay s'teen cents a word to tell me." "I don't know where the Professor is, so cannot notify him. Will arrive Stroudport next Monday with kit. Wire immediately diameter flywheel and engine revolutions per minute. JIM."

That word "kit" puzzled Sumner a good deal; but regarding the last of the message he was firm. He refused to answer by telegraph any foolish questions about engines. His next message would be by mail, for this telegram business was too expensive.

CHAPTER IX

THE EXPEDITION STARTS

“ALL we'll need is a compass, a tape-line and a crow-bar,” declared Sumner Parker, as he sat swinging his legs over the string-piece of Stevens Wharf. “I've thought it all out, and we can get along with just those.

“Why, don't you see, fellows,” he continued, turning to Val and Cal, who were seated beside him, “all we've got to do is to go down to Whale Island, find that cross on the eastern shore, go southwest three hundred and twenty paces from it, and find that box under the tilting rock.”

The trio were waiting with what patience they could muster for Captain Roderick to appear with the motor-boat “Screamer.” The clerk in the office of the Stroudport Steamboat Company had informed them that the Captain had taken a party of insurance men in his launch down to inspect the remains of the “Bay Queen,” but would return at four o'clock. It was four now, but the “Screamer” had not come.

“To hear you tell it, Sum, the whole thing is

a pie — just a pie,” said Carroll, as he sat down after rising for about the hundredth time to look down harbor. “But has it ever occurred to you that Whale Island is eight miles long, and that we may have to hunt the whole length of that eastern shore to find the cross, if there is any left there now?”

“If it was wooden it’s rotted down long ago,” contributed Val. “If it was an iron cross, it’s probably rusted down, or somebody’s taken it for old junk; and if it was a cross of stones, then the storms and frost and wind have knocked it over.”

“Don’t look so blue, Sum,” laughed Cal, as Sumner’s face fell at this recital of probabilities. “But it’s a fact, just the same, for that cross is the thing to find first, and it’s a safe bet it’ll be a big sight harder to discover the cross than it will be to find the tilting rock afterwards.”

“Even if we find the cross don’t you think it will be hard to run a line to the rock?” asked Val. “Did you ever try to run out a line with nothing but a compass to go by? Well I have, and it’s no pie! Just let me tell you something: according to the encyclopedia a pace may be either two and a half, three, or five feet long. The military pace is two and a half, the ‘double-quick’ or running pace is three feet, and the old Roman pace is five. Now which kind are we up against?”

“That’s easy,” replied Carroll. “When we find

the cross we can run a line southwest for three hundred and twenty paces of $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet each, which would be — let me see,” and he made a hurried calculation on the back of an envelope, “seven hundred feet, pretty near an eighth of a mile. If we don’t hit the rock then, we can go on till we have carried the line 320 paces of three feet each, which would be 960 feet, about a fifth of a mile from the cross.”

“I see,” eagerly burst in Sumner, “and if we don’t find the tilting rock then, why, run out the line till we make 320 paces of five feet each, and then we’ll surely hit it. Now isn’t that dead easy?”

“Just as easy as rolling off a log, Sum.” Carroll’s voice showed a trace of mild irony, but Sumner in his enthusiasm failed to catch it.

“Do you know what those islands in Penobscot Bay are like, some of ’em?” asked Val. “Now I’ve been on Whale Island, as you know, and the part I saw is a wilderness of trees, rocks and bushes. You fellows talk as though you were drawing lines on top of a drafting board. If we find that cross, you’ll see that our difficulties are only beginning.”

“Just the same we can have a dandy good time on the trip, if we don’t find the cross, or the tilting rock, or the box,” Sumner declared. “We don’t want to stay at home all summer, and this gives us a good excuse to go somewhere. We can

land on the island and make a camp, and have a great time; every night we'll gather 'round the camp-fire and tune up the mandolins and banjo; have shore dinners every day — but all the same," he broke off from his imaginative strain — "we'll find that cross, and the box under the tilting rock. You just bet your boots we will!"

At this instant the conversation was interrupted by the sound of a chime whistle, and around the end of the wharf the "Screamer" appeared and ran swiftly in to her berth.

"Is *that* the motor-boat you are talking about?" cried Sumner in rapture. "Lordy, isn't she a peach!"

And she was. As she came toward them the hull glistened with fresh white paint, while all her brass work, from the searchlight to the smallest deck cleat, shone brightly. She was what is called a raised-deck cruiser, thirty-five feet long over all, eight feet beam. Her sheer, sharp stem cut daintily through the water. Captain Roderick was at her wheel, and beside him, seated in willow chairs in the cockpit, were two other men.

Deftly, but without apparent effort, the captain reversed the engine from where he sat at the steering wheel, and as the "Screamer" rounded to gracefully and came alongside her float and stopped, he shut off the power.

"'Screamer' ahoy! Give us your line!" called Val in a merry tone, as the three ran down the

steps to the float. Captain Roderick looked careworn and tired, but his face lighted instantly when he saw the boys. He flung out the bowline, which was instantly made fast, and the occupants of the motor-boat debarked, the insurance men going up on the wharf, while the captain lingered. His voice choked a little as he greeted the trio.

"Well, boys," he cried, trying to shake the hands of all three at the same time, "the things I'd like to say to you are too deep down in my heart. They won't come out. Oh, you all did finely last night — but there, you didn't come down to hear me say that. You came to see the 'Screamer' — well, here she is, and ain't she a corker? She just came down from Boston last week, and she's a mighty able boat, comfortable, too, and for speed — well, I guess she can lay 'em all out, that is, everything in her class!"

"She certainly does look good to me," said Val, gazing with approval at the handsome lines of the motor-boat. "Have you ever gone up against Rad Conway's 'Ginger' with her yet?"

"She's got the 'Ginger' skun!" declared the Captain, in vigorous if inelegant language. "Skun to death!"

"Can we go on her?" queried Sumner, anxiously.

"Can you? — why sure, that's what you're here for, ain't it?" the Captain laughed. "Now look here, boys: I've got to give those two insurance

men more of my time yet. Here's the 'Screamer' — you just get aboard and take her out for an hour."

"Do you mean it, Captain?" cried Val, delightedly, as the three boys followed the Captain on board of his boat.

"Of course I mean it! You can run a gasoline engine, some of you, can't you? Why, of course you can," as Val and Carroll both nodded. "The gasoline's turned on, so all you've got to do is let go her bowline, cut in the batteries, give the flywheel half a turn, and she'll go off like clockwork. Then switch over to the magneto.

"I'm sorry, but I can't stop to show you over her — you can do that yourselves; but here's her steering wheel, right handy in the cockpit. Here's the throttle control, and the clutch for throwing your engine into gear and for reversing the propeller, all handy so you don't have to leave the wheel to reach 'em. When this clutch lever is forward — so — she goes ahead; when it's on the center, this way, the engine is cut off from the propeller shaft and she stands still; when it's pulled back like this she goes astern.

"There, now, you can all build one just like her," he laughed in great good humor. "Just make yourselves at home, look her over, try her out, and get back here at five o'clock, and we'll have a talk about cruising." And the captain jumped down to the float, hurried up the stairs

to the wharf and vanished in the steamboat company's office.

"Did you flag all that?" Sumner asked, as he looked about the "Screamer" with puzzled but delighted eyes.

"Didn't have to; knew it before," vouchsafed Carroll as he stepped down into the engine room, followed by his companions.

It would be hard to say which pleased the boys most, the outside or the inside of the "Screamer." Outside, her decks were laid fore and aft in narrow strips of solid mahogany; a twelve-foot tender lay in its chocks on top of the cabin, with davits turned inboard; the sides of the trunk cabin, above the deck, were of white oak, as was the coaming around the cockpit, but all the other exposed outside woodwork was of mahogany. At the back of the cozy cockpit — which was provided with scuppers so that it would be self-bailing in case water came aboard — was a broad, cushioned seat, running crosswise, with a most comfortable-looking back — what is termed a "lazy-back." Beside this seat there were a few willow arm chairs, in the cockpit, and the high seat, with a back, in which the steersman could sit while on duty. An ample awning, which could be taken down and stowed away in a few moments, covered the cockpit and the after portion of the cabin.

But the interior was even more interesting.

The short flight of steps, or companionway, led down into an apartment that was both engine-room and galley. The engine, which lay well back under the floor of the cockpit — and could be reached from it by lifting a water-tight trap in the floor — was readily accessible from the engine-room.

On the left of the engine was the galley, with a blue-flame stove, cupboard, sink, hinged table, and lockers. Aft, under the cockpit, was an ample ice-chest, and plenty of room to store provisions. To the right of the companion was the wash-room.

Passing forward through a doorway one entered the cabin proper, which was finished in mahogany and white enamel. Broad transoms or seats, with lockers underneath, occupied the space along the sides, affording sleeping accommodation for four persons; and forward of this was the forecastle, a tiny space containing a double berth running crosswise of the boat. Ten large portholes and a skylight over the engine-room lighted the interior, while a ventilator on the forward deck helped to keep the air sweet and fresh.

“What’s she got for an engine?” Val inquired of Carroll, who was bending over the machinery after a brief inspection had been made of the rest of the cruiser.

“It’s a three-cylinder, two-cycle ‘Hustler,’” was the reply.

“Let’s go ahead and make her ‘hustle,’ then. What do you say, boys, to running over to the ‘Spitfire’ and getting the taffrail log, and speeding this little lady down to the ruins of the ‘Bay Queen’ and back? We can do it easy by five o’clock if she’s as fast as the Captain says.”

Cal and Sumner instantly agreed to this program. Sumner climbed down to the float, let go the bowline, and shoved the “Screamer’s” bow off. By this time Cal had the motor started, and, when the boat had swung around so that she headed toward the outer end of the dock, Val threw in the clutch. As Sumner scrambled in over the stern the “Screamer” got under way, and when she cleared the pier-head Val headed out to the “Spitfire’s” anchorage, and tuned up the speed controller so that the motor-boat began to show her best paces. In a very few minutes they stopped alongside the sloop and Val went on board and secured the log.

This was a contrivance for showing the distance travelled by a vessel. It consisted of a brass box with a glass window in which showed a series of dials reminding one of a gas meter, or a cyclometer. This box was attached to the after rail, and the mechanism it contained was operated by a hollow brass screw or rotator, on the end of a closely-woven cord, which trailed in the water astern as the boat progressed. The screw by being dragged through the water was forced to

revolve. This in turn twisted the line, and the line being attached to the mechanism of the brass box, made the dials register the distance travelled.

"Now we're off again," exclaimed Sumner, seating himself comfortably in one of the cockpit chairs. Val fastened the log to a cleat on the "Screamer's" overhang, and threw the rotator overboard, and as the boat went ahead again, the line began to twist and the dials to record distance.

"It's just four-fifteen by the best watch on board," grinned Sumner as he consulted his timepiece. "Now let her out! I wish we could run up against Rad Conway and the 'Ginger,'" he sighed, regretfully.

"You'd better wait till we get the hang of the engine a little before you begin to talk of racing," said Carroll, emerging from the engine-room at this moment.

"Say, but she runs fine, don't she, old man?" remarked Val.

"Just as sweet and clean and true as they can possibly make 'em," was the enthusiastic reply. "Do you hear that exhaust? She never misses a charge, and vibration — why you'd think she ran on springs, there's so little of it!"

"If we can get the Captain to let us take this boat for our Whale Island expedition we'll be made," remarked Val, as he headed the

“ Screamer ” a trifle to starboard to shave the buoy off “ Bug ” light at the entrance to the inner harbor.

A few moments later they rounded the end of the breakwater and went spinning down the ship channel in hot pursuit of a schooner-yacht that was getting to sea under her own sail before a fair westerly breeze.

“ Penelope, New York,” Cal read on the schooner’s stern as they rapidly overhauled her. “ Now that’s what I call fun,” he exclaimed, waving a hand at the yacht. “ Go off for a three months’ cruise alongshore in a craft like that — she’s ninety feet long if she’s an inch, so there’s lots of room — have a captain and crew to do all the work, put in where you please, sail when you get ready, and take along all the friends you can find to go.”

The “ Screamer ” was now abreast of the “ Penelope’s ” quarter, and the boys viewed her well-kept decks and fittings with much interest. Besides a seaman at the wheel there were two other men in the after-deck. One of them, short of stature and somewhat inclined to be stout, was clad in clothes of a decidedly loud and sporty pattern. His attention was arrested by the motor-boat as she ranged alongside, and when his eyes caught the name on her bow he ran to the rail.

“ Isn’t he a dead-game sport? ” laughed Sumner.

"If he owns the schooner I can tell pretty well what kind of a crowd sails in her," remarked Val, somewhat contemptuously.

"Halloo, there!" bawled the man in the loud clothing. "Come a little closer, will you?"

"Say, Mr. Sport is hollering to us," said Carroll. "What do you s'pose he wants?"

"Give it up," said Val, twisting the steering wheel a trifle to port and bringing the "Screamer" in toward the schooner, while at the same time he slowed down to the pace of the other vessel. "But if he wants to talk I guess we can accommodate him."

"Where'd you get that boat?" asked the fellow at the "Penelope's" rail in a lower tone, for the two craft were now not more than twenty-five feet apart.

"She belongs to Captain James Roderick of Stroudport," Val called back with what courtesy he could muster, for his interrogator's manner was rather offensive.

"Belongs to who?" cried the other, again raising his voice.

Val repeated his statement.

"Not much she don't!" was the surprising retort of the fellow in the sporty clothing. "She belongs to —"

But at this instant the young fellow's companion, a tall, dark-complexioned chap, who had been standing a short distance away during the

beginning of the colloquy, seized him rather forcibly from behind and twisted him suddenly around so that the name he uttered did not reach the ears of the boys.

Then the pair on the schooner engaged for a few moments in loud but unintelligible conversation.

"What were you going to say?" called Carroll; but the young man who had caused the interruption turned and waved him off.

"Nothing! It's a mistake! Go ahead!"

"It's not a mistake!" cried his companion of the loud clothes, adding some unpleasant words which we will not repeat. "I tell you that boat belongs —"

"You shut up, you confounded fool!" the other cried, and turning once more to the "Screamer:" "Go ahead. That's all we want!"

But Val had already pushed the speed controller over and the motor-boat was drawing rapidly past the "Penelope." However, for several minutes after this brief but odd conversation the boys could see the two on the schooner's quarter gazing after them and talking earnestly, while the one in loud garments gesticulated vigorously.

"Well, what do you make of that?" asked Carroll, curiously. "That young fellow seemed to think you were lying to him."

"Oh, he's just mistaken, that's all," was Val's careless reply.

"He probably thinks this is some other boat," Sumner ventured, and for the time being the incident passed out of their thoughts.

Val laid a course straight for the southern end of Jackson Island, and with her motor doing its best the "Screamer" ploughed rapidly along, while every minute the trio on board became more and more captivated with her.

"There's what's left of the 'Bay Queen,'" exclaimed Val, as they rounded the island and came in view of the scene of the previous night's catastrophe. As the *News* had stated, the fireboat had saved the hull from destruction, and a portion of her afterworks were standing, while the upright boiler, which had caused all the trouble, showed itself amidships above the rail. She was a melancholy sight as the boys ran alongside. The underwriters having finished their inspection, a tug was just taking her in tow.

"What does the log say and what does the watch say?" demanded Val, as the "Screamer" stopped not far from the ruined steamer. "We lost a little time talking with those fellows on the schooner; but we'll do better going back, I'm thinking."

"We've come just two and a half — what is it, miles or knots? — in fifteen minutes," Sumner replied after reading the log and inspecting the reliable timepiece he carried.

"That registers knots — geographical miles,"

said Carroll. "Hm! Ten knots an hour isn't bad, fellows; that's pretty near twelve miles. I'll bet she can beat it, though!"

"Let's see her do it, then," cried Val. "We'll run from here to the buoy on the north end of Jackson, make a straight course from there to Bug Light, and from there to the wharf — that's about three knots, for a guess."

After a brief inspection of the "Bay Queen," the motor-boat got under way for her record run back to the city. With Carroll tuning up the engine and Val at the wheel, while Sumner made himself comfortable wherever it suited his mood, the course suggested by the steersman was followed at the highest possible speed. As they rounded the end of Stevens wharf Sumner pulled in the logline and read the registration of the dials.

"Just three knots," he announced; and then pulling out his watch: "in just fifteen minutes."

"Twelve knots an hour, Cal," called Val to the engineer. "Fourteen miles in sixty minutes! The 'Ginger' *will* have to be going some to keep even within smelling distance."

They made the "Screamer" fast to her float just as Captain Roderick emerged from the steamboat company office and came down to the water.

"How'd you like her, boys?" he asked.

"She's a crackerjack! What'll you charge to let us take her for a cruise?"

“Where are you going and how long?”

“Down to Penobscot Bay for maybe a month.”

“You can have her for nothing,” was the surprising declaration, “unless —”

“We don’t want her on any such terms, Captain,” Val declared. “We’d rather pay —”

“— Unless,” went on the Captain evenly, without noticing the interruption, “unless Mr. Sidney Manning shows up here before five o’clock with a certain sum of money in his fist and buys her.”

“Who is Sidney Manning?” asked Val.

“He’s a rich bug who’s spending the summer down the harbor somewhere — Harpsboro, I think. I gave him a refusal of her for one week. That refusal expires at five o’clock to-night, and if he don’t show up here before then with the cash, you boys can take her for your cruise and welcome.

“Now look here,” he rejoined with some warmth, as Val continued his protest against taking the “Screamer” without paying rental, “you fellows know I won’t offer you money for what you did for me last night when the ‘Bay Queen’ burned. Then why can’t you be decent and let me lend you my boat? You make me tired! If this Mr. Manning doesn’t show up — and I guess he won’t all right, for it’s getting late — you just take the ‘Screamer,’ treat her as you would like to have anyone use your own boat, and bring her back when you get done with her.

"You fellows are the only ones I would trust her with out of my sight," he declared, "but you've got pluck and courage, and I'll be willing to bet if you get into any tight places you can get out again!"

"What do you say, fellows?" Val turned to Carroll and Sumner, who were very interested listeners.

"I say that Captain Roderick is a trump!" cried Sumner.

"That means you take her," declared the Captain, "unless —"

At this moment came the sound of hurried footsteps on the planking of the wharf.

"Halloo, Captain Roderick! Are you there?" called a masculine voice, somewhat out of breath.

The four turned to see a well-dressed man descending the steps to the float. He was in very much of a hurry, and, as he came, pulled out his pocket-book, and extracted therefrom a roll of bills.

"I remembered what you said about being prompt if I was to do business with you, Captain," he remarked, coming up to that person, and holding out the money. "Here's the cash, and I'll take the 'Screamer'!"

"All right, Mr. Manning," replied Captain Roderick, in a curious sort of grumble, "but if you'd been a minute later you'd have been too late altogether."

It was a keen disappointment for the three boys, and they did not talk much as they walked back uptown and separated for the night. That evening Sumner wrote a long letter to Jim Hilton. Among other things it contained the following:

“ You’d better leave that cat at home, Jim. Cats are no earthly use on a yacht — they’re always falling overboard and yowling. And the flywheel hasn’t any diameter, or any revolutions, either, because after all we are going on the ‘ Spitfire.’ ”

Heeling over under a keen northwest wind the sloop-yacht “ Spitfire,” with mainsail, jib and jib-topsail set, was heading down the ship channel out past Robertson’s cove and Jackson Island toward the open sea. On board were four young men: Val Brandon, owner and captain of the jaunty craft; Carroll Morse, the mate; Sumner Parker, able seaman and member of the captain’s watch; and James — otherwise “ Jim ” — Hilton, of Burlington, Vermont, more or less able seaman, and member of the port watch under the mate.

Crowding every locker and each available nook and corner of the yacht were provisions of various kinds, canned and fresh, clothing, bedding, camp paraphernalia, two mandolins and a banjo, and a shovel and crowbar. In addition to all these was a wooden chest belonging to Jim, which he positively refused to leave behind. It was of

wood, varnished, and on the lid were painted the words "The Kit." Jim kept it locked and would not divulge the nature of its contents.

"You just wait and see," he replied to all inquiries.

It was about eight o'clock on the Tuesday morning following the day that Val, Cal and Sumner had tried out the "Screamer," and received a disappointment that even now they hated to talk about. And it is needless to explain that this was the expedition to Whale Island to find the cross on the eastern shore, to run a line from it to the tilting rock, to tip up that rock and find the box beneath.

It had required a good deal of persuasion on the boys' part to get their parents' consent to such a trip. Strange to relate, none of their respective fathers and mothers seemed to place as much confidence in or had as much enthusiasm over the translation of the ciphers as they themselves. The difficulties confronting the search seemed pretty grave; besides, what if the boys ran into another gang of ruffians such as they had on the previous summer? But it was Captain Bucklin who finally turned the tide in their favor.

"How do you expect the boys to learn to swim if they never go near the water?" he demanded, speaking figuratively. "If they are going to learn self-reliance and develop their courage and muscle they've got to go out in the world where

they'll have to depend on themselves, haven't they? Why, certainly!

"Now that cipher business may not be worth the powder to blow it up, but let 'em go and find out for themselves," he urged. "They'll never be satisfied until they do, and if they don't turn up in a reasonable time, why, we'll just take the old 'Storm King' and go take a look for 'em!"

That settled it, and the "Spitfire" was at last underway for Penobscot Bay. The regulations provided that the two watches should sail her on alternate days; on the day the starboard watch sailed the yacht and kept things trim on deck, the port watch should do the cooking and keep matters tidy below. The next day the watches would change about. Thus the captain would be in charge of the sailing one day, and the mate the next; but in an emergency everyone might be called upon to help, and, of course, at all times the authority of the captain outranked that of the mate, even when the latter was in charge of the deck, if the captain thought him to be in the wrong.

As has been stated, the "Spitfire" was thirty-five feet over all, and carried four sails — main, jib, gaff-topsail and jibtopsail. She could easily accommodate four in her cabin, and was one of the trimmest and fastest boats of her class that belonged to the Stroudport Yacht Club. When they

started on that memorable cruise of the year before the boys had thought that her accommodations and equipment left nothing to be desired; but this year Val had made several improvements that rendered the yacht much better for cruising, the principal one being to extend the cabin trunk three feet further back into the cockpit, thus obtaining room for a washroom on the starboard side, and a galley, with blue-flame oil stove, hinged table, cupboard, and a small sink, on the port side, just inside the companion. This extension of the cabin of course curtailed the standing-room, but as this had been more than ample before, the shortening was not very appreciable.

The start had been auspicious. Everyone was in a happy mood. Monday had been hot and showery — a sticky, “muggy” day, which had closed with a series of violent thunder-showers in the evening. Tuesday morning dawned bright and fair, with a brisk northwest wind chasing away the humid stickiness, and starting from their anchorage a number of coasting craft that had been waiting in Stroudport harbor for a fair wind.

It also had the effect of sending out a party in a trim looking motor-boat which came puffing out of Robertson's cove just as the “Spitfire” passed the eastern point. There was a young man at the wheel forward, another at the engine, and distributed about in various places were several

ladies. As she cleared the entrance of the cove the launch turned down channel in pursuit of the sloop.

"A race, boys!" cried Sumner, enthusiastically. "Here comes a motor-boat! Hi, Captain Brandon, what say we crack on all sail and give 'em a run for their money?"

Val glanced astern and caught the name on the motor-boat's bow, though she was still some distance away.

"That's the 'Ginger,'" he laughed. "She'd lick us right out of our boots."

"I'll bet she can't," cried Carroll. "Come now, where's your sporting blood? I'll bet you the 'Spitfire' can keep her guessing a good while!"

"All right, boys," agreed Val, catching the spirit of the thing, "if you want to see what the old girl can do; but you must remember she's pulling a rowboat, too."

"Break out that topsail from the sail-locker, Sum," he at once ordered. The other member of the starboard watch obeyed, and, despite the strong wind, they succeeded in setting it in short order. The boys had thought the yacht was walking along before, but now she seemed to fairly fly. With every stitch of her canvas drawing, the "Spitfire" sped on like a thing of life. She had always proved herself a fast sailer on a beat to windward, but now she was running free, and it seemed to Sumner and Carroll that she was

making as fast time as had the "Screamer" over the same ground a few days previously.

But Val, although he said nothing, knew better; though the "Ginger" did not seem to be more than holding her own at the present moment, he had been told she had made twelve miles an hour over a measured course, while such speed from the sloop could only be obtained under exceptional weather conditions. And now Rad Conway and his party caught the racing spirit, and took up the gauntlet that the "Spitfire" had thrown down. Since the setting of the top-sail she had drawn no nearer, but the boys could see Rad bending over the engine, adjusting first this and then that part of the mechanism, so that presently, with her machinery tuned up and working to its highest capacity, slowly the "Ginger" gained on her adversary. Nearer and nearer she came, while Sumner called on all the winds of heaven to help, and groaned in mock anguish.

Down past Jackson Island, — past Cushman Island on the left hand and the rocky shore of Cape Eastern to starboard, on they went, the "Spitfire" looking like nothing more than a huge white-winged bird skimming before the wind; while her adversary, with none of the sloop's grace and poetry of motion, impelled by what Jim contemptuously termed "nothing but a heap o' junk," crept up and crept up, till at last she worked her way abreast and not fifty

feet away. And then she began slowly but surely to draw away from the "Spitfire"—slowly but surely the superiority of machinery over sail power evinced itself. Then and not till then did Rad Conway utter a word to those with whom he was contesting; but now, when the stern of his trim boat had drawn well forward of the jib-boom of the flying yacht, he waved his hand to the quartette on the yacht.

"Give us your bowline, fellows," he shouted, through a megaphone; "give us your bowline, and we'll take you in tow!" And then, having demonstrated the speed of his boat to his own and his guests' satisfaction, Rad sent the "Ginger" around in a broad curve and she headed back up the channel.

"Now wouldn't that drive a man to drink," gritted Sumner. "Next time we meet Rad Conway I hope to goodness we won't be towing a fifteen-foot boat. Why, we'd have beaten the boots right off'n him if it hadn't been for that tender, Jim!"

For Sumner had bragged a good deal to Jim Hilton of what the "Spitfire" could do, and it galled him wofully to have her beaten in any kind of a race, fair or unfair.

"Never mind, Sum, we're just so much nearer Whale Island," said Carroll, consolingly, and the four settled down once more.

The topsail was lowered and furled, for it was

really too much sail to carry comfortably under the present weather conditions; and after Cushman Island had been passed and they were abreast of the lighthouse on Ram Island Ledge, they "wore ship" and laid a course about north by east.

"If this wind holds, boys, we'll sight Whale Island by to-morrow morning this time," said Val, jubilantly.

They had been running on this course for nearly an hour when the attention of all was attracted by the peculiar actions of a motor-boat, which, coming from the direction of Broad Sound, of a sudden appeared to be in trouble. When first observed she was holding a southeasterly course that would make her pass the "Spitfire" at close range, but as the boys watched and commented on her probable identity and character, while still fully a quarter of a mile to windward she lost her headway, swung around, and began to roll heavily in the trough of the sea that the stiff breeze was kicking up.

Filled with old-time curiosity Sumner brought out the binoculars and focussed them on the newcomer.

"She's rolling to beat the cars," he announced, promptly. "I can see a couple of girls on board — can't see a man anywhere —"

"Oh, the men are all down inside juggling the engine," commented Carroll.

“She’s a motor-boat cruiser. She looks like — say, fellows, she *is* the ‘Screamer’!” Sumner was now fairly hopping up and down with excitement.

“Look! Look!” he cried. “There’s smoke coming from her. Head for her quick, Val. She’s in trouble!”

Val Brandon needed no second bidding. To starboard went the helm, the sheets were trimmed in, and the yacht began beating swiftly up towards the disabled motor-boat.

CHAPTER X

MR. MANNING CHANGES HIS MIND

ON board the "Spitfire" reigned great excitement. The curl of smoke issuing from the "Screamer's" companion, which had at first been visible only to Sumner through the glasses, was now plainly seen by the others, for its volume was increasing.

"There's a man!" called Sumner, suddenly. "He just ran out of the cabin. His clothes seem to be burning, and he's trying to beat 'em out with his hands. Lordy! He's jumped overboard!"

"Pull the tender alongside, Sum," ordered the skipper, "and see that both pairs of oars are in her.

"You take the tiller, Cal," he continued, "and run the 'Spitfire' up to windward as close as you dare to."

Carroll instantly took the captain's place at the helm, and while Sumner was getting the tender under the lee quarter Val secured from the cabin a tin tube, maybe two feet long and three inches

in diameter, on which were painted the words, "Climax Fire Extinguisher."

"I must say that I smiled when Mr. Culberson gave me this, but now is the time for it to make good," he remarked. "It contains powdered chemicals. You sprinkle it on the flames, and the heat changes the powder to carbonic acid gas, which puts the fire out."

"Where's the man now? Still in the water?" This to Jim, who had taken the glasses from Sumner.

"He's splashing 'round near the boat, but can't seem to get near enough to catch hold of anything. One of the girls is trying to fish him out with a boat-hook. Gee! Look at that smoke! The other girl is waving to us to come on."

"She needn't wave — we're coming all right," rejoined Cal, grimly, for by this time the "Spit-fire" was within a hundred yards of the motor-boat.

"Now, into the boat with you, Sum, and dig for dear life!" cried Val, and a moment later the two were urging the tender in jumps across the intervening stretch of water.

"We'll pull the man into the tender, first," decided Val. "Then you get as close to the motor-boat as you can and I'll jump aboard and tackle that fire!"

This plan was carried out. Almost as soon as it takes to tell it the row-boat was upon the man,

who still struggled in the water. He was unable to reach the boat-hook held out to him by the girl, for the wind drifted the "Screamer" away from him faster than he could swim, encumbered with shoes and other clothing.

"Now take her alone!" Val pulled in his oars, stepped forward, and leaning down over the bow, caught the swimmer by the collar. Then he pulled aboard a very wet and exhausted individual and deposited him on a seat.

By this time quite a cloud of smoke was issuing from the companionway of the motor-boat. The two pretty young ladies, in natty yachting costumes, who appeared to be now the sole occupants, had gone aft as far as they could get, and were hanging on tightly to steady themselves against the boat's rolling. No doubt they were alarmed, as well they might be, but they made no foolish outcry as they watched the approach of the rowboat and the rescue of their companion.

The moment he had the man safe Val seized the fire-extinguisher and stood up in the bow, ready to jump.

"Will you catch it?" he called to the nearest girl, a prepossessing young lady with dark eyes and hair, who wore a white yachting suit, and he waved the tube toward her.

She nodded, Val tossed it, and she caught it deftly. Then the tender's bow bumped the "Screamer's" starboard quarter. Val jumped,

and reached for the brass handrail. The two boats rolled toward each other at that instant, and he landed on the narrow deck outside the coaming, and half fell over into the cockpit.

"Is the fire around the engine?" he inquired with a hurried courtesy as he recovered his balance; but it was the girl in blue with the light hair and blue eyes to whom he found himself talking.

"Oh, I think so. Dorothy knows," she responded, nervously. "There's so much smoke it is hard to tell much about it."

Val turned toward the companionway. To his surprise he saw the girl in white bending beside it, with one hand shielding her face as best she could from the smoke that was issuing from the cabin, while the other hand was busily engaged in shaking something about inside.

"There," she exclaimed, rising with flushed face as Val reached her side, "I've sprinkled all your fire extinguisher over the flames, and if you will kindly shut the cabin door I guess we can smother the thing out."

"Well, you're a girl in a thousand," said Val admiringly, as he promptly shut the doors and drew the slide. "How did you know the way to work that extinguisher? And do you know," he added in alarm, for he had not thought of it before, "that there's a seventy-five gallon tank of gaso-

line up forward, and all sorts of disagreeable things will happen if the fire gets to it? ”

“ Sh! Sh! ” she cautioned. “ Don’t tell Grace; she’d be scared to death. I never thought of it, for we’ve been trying to get papa out of the water almost ever since the fire started, and things happened so fast we couldn’t do much thinking.”

“ You’d better let us put you and your friend — ”

“ I am Dorothy Manning, and this is my sister Grace,” broke in the girl in white.

“ And I am Val Brandon. You’d better let us put you on our yacht till we can get things straightened out here.”

“ You can take Grace over if she wants to go, and papa. Poor papa! I’ll bet he’ll never be hired to get on a motor-boat again in all his life! But *I’m* going to stay right here till that fire is out, gasoline or no gasoline!” And Miss Dorothy spoke as if she had made up her mind fully on that point.

“ You’re a trump!” said Val, looking his admiration for her pluck. He called to Sumner who was holding the tender alongside — as closely as he could without bumping. The rescued gentleman, whom Val at once concluded was Mr. Sidney Manning — though in his present condition he looked very different from the man who had bought the “ Screamer ” a few days before — was recovering his breath as fast as he

could, and at the same time regarding the motor-boat with great apprehension.

"Come 'round to leeward, Sum," directed Val, "and take off one of these ladies and put her on the 'Spitfire' with Mr. Manning if he wishes to go."

"Take 'em all, sir! Take 'em all off!" said Mr. Manning in decided tones to Sumner. "That boat is likely to blow up at any moment — at any moment, I say!"

Sumner rowed around to the lee side, and after several attempts Miss Grace was successfully deposited in the stern of the tender. Dorothy, however, positively refused to leave the motor-boat, despite her father's expostulations.

"The fire's out already, papa," she declared, "and I want to know what's the matter with that horrid engine."

"Have your own way then," he retorted. "Nothing would tempt *me* to ever set foot on her again. Is that your sloop?" he queried, addressing Val, who replied in the affirmative.

"I'll pay you well, sir, if you can take us back to Harpsboro."

"We'll do it with pleasure," replied the young skipper. "Put them aboard of the yacht and come back as soon as you can, Sum. Tell Cal and Jim we're going to run for Harpsboro, and if the fire's out here I'll try to get the engine going and sail the 'Screamer' back too. If the engine won't

work, the 'Spitfire' will have to take us in tow."

While this was happening the yacht had been standing off and on a short distance to windward, and when Carroll saw Sumner rowing towards them he promptly brought the sloop into the wind and let her drift down to meet him. Sumner delivered his passengers and Val's message and went back to the motor-boat. Carroll, however, tired of inaction, and not knowing how long it might be before the "Screamer's" engine would consent to run, decided to begin towing operations at once; so he brought the yacht as close alongside as he dared, Val went forward and threw him the motor-boat's bowline, and soon the "Spitfire" was beating slowly up toward Harpsboro with the "Screamer" a dead weight astern. Sumner, at the steering wheel of the latter, kept her properly headed.

Since Miss Dorothy had sprinkled the fire so liberally with the powder from the extinguisher and the companion had been closed, not a sound had come from the interior. Val made several inspections through the skylight, but each time reported nothing visible but smoke.

"I believe it's safe to open her up and take a look," he announced, presently, and then pushed back the companion slide and opened the doors. A cloud of smoke, forced out by the wind driving in at the ventilator forward, belched into their

faces, but it soon thinned, and investigation showed that the fire was out.

"You make a dandy fireman, Miss Manning," said Val, with enthusiasm, when this fact was ascertained.

"Pshaw!" was the deprecatory reply. "I don't believe there was much of a fire after all."

Val entered the cabin, opened all the side ports, raised the skylight, and the last vestiges of smoke quickly disappeared.

"Now will you walk into my parlor?" he inquired, smiling up at Miss Dorothy, who was gazing in at the companionway, "or do you think it's too sooty for white suits?"

She evidently didn't think so, for she promptly descended the steps and looked on with much interest while Val inspected the scene of the fire and the dead engine. The interior of the boat, save for the effects of the smoke, was not damaged. The engine was set in a galvanized iron drip pan, and in this they discovered the smouldering remnants of a package of cotton waste.

"There's all that's left of the fire," said Val. "Cotton waste and oil and gasoline made all the trouble, but I don't see how it caught in the first place. Do you know?"

"Why yes; it was papa's cigar," and Dorothy sat down on a stool and watched Val as he tinkered the machinery.

"You tell papa for me that he doesn't want to do any smoking 'round a gasoline engine."

"I'm sure he never will again," was the earnest reply. "You see, everything was running all right. Oh, it was lovely! When papa brought the 'Screamer' home last week I was crazy to go right off on a cruise, for what's the use of a cruiser if you don't go cruising?"

"That's right, too," murmured Val, who was taking a look at the carburetor, which seemed to be a likely seat of trouble.

"But mamma wouldn't stir a step. However, I got papa and Grace worked up to the right pitch at last; so last night we got up a great old lunch — say, you don't feel hungry, do you, because that ice-chest is full of —"

"Full of smoked sandwiches?" queried Val, laughing.

"My goodness!" Miss Manning jumped up and opened the ice-chest door. "They are *not* smoked, even a little bit," she declared in a tone of relief, after sniffing vigorously and examining some of the eatables.

"That's because you're such an expert fireman, and laid that extinguisher on so thick."

"If you mention that again I shall know you think I was wasteful, and should only have put on a spoonful at a time."

"No, I brought that tube along on purpose for this fire," declared Val, who had finished with

the carburetor and was overhauling the wiring. "Well, what happened?"

"I was steering, and just about the time we saw your sail-boat the old engine stopped. Now papa is great in a sail-boat, but he knows just as much about a gasoline engine as a fly. However, he was plucky, and started in to fix it. I don't know just what he did, and he didn't have time to tell us, but he was bending over that thing you were just looking at, the car—, car—"

"Carburetor?"

"Yes, that's the name; and he said, 'I guess there must be some dirt or water in the gasoline, so I'll just open up here;' and he opened up, and the gasoline squirted out on his clothes. He jumped back, and his cigar dropped out of his mouth. Biff! Bang! There was an explosion, and papa fell over backwards on the floor, and I was looking in at the door and I 'most fell over backwards out there too.

"The oil and stuff in that pan around the engine began to burn up, and the gasoline on papa's clothes caught afire, and he rushed out, beating himself with his hands. Oh! he was a sight! His side-whiskers were nearly ruined, and his eyebrows and eyelashes were all frizzled up, and his front hair was scorched, and his face was all soot. And before we could do anything to help him put out the fire on his clothes, he got desperate

and jumped into the water — and — and you know the rest," she added simply.

"I wanted to do something to put out the fire before you got here," she went on, after a moment's pause, "but the smoke was so thick we weren't able to get in to find a pail, so we couldn't put any water on it."

"It's lucky you couldn't," Val replied, earnestly. "Please don't ever pour water on a gasoline fire, for the gasoline will just come to the top of the water and spread around all the more and keep right on burning."

"Yes, but what do I want to do?"

"Why, smother it with a blanket; or if you haven't got a blanket handy, just send for me, and I will bring you another tube of fire extinguisher."

Dorothy's eyes sparkled and she laughed heartily.

"That last is worth remembering," she said. "Why, have you got it fixed so soon?" for Val had cranked up, and the engine started off without any trouble whatever.

"Surely; there wasn't much of anything the matter. One of the circulation valves got turned off, and the cylinder overheated till the piston stuck, and then she stopped."

"I certainly must get a book on 'What to do when the gasoline engine won't go,'" Dorothy declared; "but there, I know well enough that

papa will sell the 'Screamer' after all this fuss."

They went out into the cockpit, and found that the motor-boat was rapidly overhauling the "Spitfire," so Val went forward and gathered in the bowline that Jim had cast off when he saw that the engine was again in running order, and in a few minutes Sumner, under Val's direction, brought the "Screamer" within easy hailing distance of the yacht.

Mr. Manning had donned a spare suit of Carroll's, and put on a sweater, for the sea-water outside of Stroudport Bay has a chill in it even in midsummer.

"The fire's out and the engine's running," called Val to the motor-boat's owner. "Will you take your boat again, now, Mr. Manning?"

The recently rescued one shook his head very vigorously, and raised his hands deprecatingly.

"No, thank you!" was his decided reply. "If you'll keep right on to Harpsboro with her I'll make it worth your while."

"Don't you want to come over here, Grace?" asked Dorothy.

"If you don't mind I'd rather stay here, Dot," returned the girl in blue. "Mr. Morse is teaching me to sail the 'Spitfire,' and it's too interesting to leave."

"I guess that means that our day's cruise is spoiled," said Dorothy, but with a smile that

showed she did not feel very badly about it, after all, "but what in the world is that white stuff that papa has got on his hands?"

"He burned them beating out the fire, didn't he?"

"Oh, he must have."

"Then if I was going to guess, I'd say it was cooking soda."

The two boats drew apart as the "Screamer" forged slowly ahead of the yacht. Sumner seemed to get so much enjoyment out of steering that Val left him in possession of the wheel, and, after thoroughly oiling up and adjusting the engine, joined Miss Dorothy where she was seated in the comfortable lazyback at the rear of the cockpit.

"Why didn't you tell me your yacht was named the 'Spitfire'?" she demanded, as he sat down beside her.

"I was just going to," he retorted, unabashed, "but I don't see how that interests you."

"Isn't there a young man in your party named Jim Hilton?"

"Yes, indeed; do you know him? He's the one with the duck trousers and the red sweater. Why, are you from Burlington, too?"

"No, but his sister Madge is stopping next door to us at Harpsboro, and she's told us all about her brother Jim, and Sumner Parker and Carroll Morse and a certain Mr. Val Brandon, and how they are going cruising on the 'Spitfire.'"

"Well, I declare. I don't believe Jim knows she's there; he said she was down at Southport with her cousin. Say, Sum, did you hear that?" and Val laughed slyly as Sumner turned his head. "Madge Hilton will probably be down to the wharf to meet us when we get to Harpsboro," he prevaricated.

"Lordy!" ejaculated Sumner, and he resumed his steering, while a flush overspread his face and extended back to his ears and up to the roots of his hair.

"She's an awfully pretty girl, too, but I don't see why that should make Mr. Parker blush so."

"You just ask Miss Hilton about it sometime," replied Val, and he couldn't be cajoled into telling her the cause of Sumner's reddening.

"I shall ask her this very day," declared Dorothy, "for I intend to bring her right down to the wharf to surprise her brother."

It is needless to repeat all the merry conversation that enlivened the passage of the "Screamer" back to Harpsboro. The time passed all too quickly for Val, for Miss Dorothy Manning proved to be excellent company, and she did not seem to find the skipper of the "Spitfire" at all dull.

The motor-boat reached her destination a quarter of an hour before the "Spitfire" came beating up and dropped anchor a short distance off the steamer landing. The "Screamer," which

had been drifting about during the wait, now ran alongside.

"Mr. Manning has something to say to you, Val," said Carroll as the two boats touched.

"I hope Mr. Manning isn't going to try and pay us for bringing him home," was the quick reply.

"You have saved my life and put me under great obligation," declared that gentleman, with much feeling. "And my daughters and myself all thank you; but that wasn't all I want to say to you, Mr. Brandon."

The tender which had been towing behind the motor-boat was transferred to the sloop, Mr. Manning handed his daughter Grace aboard the "Screamer" and climbed gingerly on himself — acting as if he thought another explosion was imminent — and Val and Sumner brought the craft alongside a landing float in short order.

"Ugh! Nothing would tempt me to go out in that boat again!" declared Mr. Manning as he stepped to the float, and paused while Val and Sumner put the short companion steps in place and assisted Dorothy and Grace to debark. "I am a sadder and a wiser man," said he, with emphasis, "and what I don't know about gasoline engines would fill a large volume. I had no idea that gasoline was so highly explosive! And how it smells!"

"Oh, you'll get your nerve back in a little

while, papa," declared Dorothy. "I think the 'Screamer' is just a dandy boat!"

"So she is — for somebody else; but my hands are sore yet," he looked at them ruefully; "and who wants to lose his hair and eyebrows every time he goes sailing?"

"No sir! I'm going to dispose of her at once. I was a fool to buy her at all! What do you think of her, Mr. Brandon?" he demanded. "Mr. Morse tells me you had some thought of going on a cruise in her, but that I got ahead of you."

"Oh, she's all right enough," said Val, with apparent carelessness, but wondering mightily what Mr. Manning had in mind. The group still stood on the float, for nobody seemed to be in any hurry.

"I was very much taken with your yacht," admitted the owner of the motor-boat. "I am at home in a sail-boat — I have sailed since I was a boy. The way she pointed into the wind on that last reach up the sound, say, it was great! And the way she comes about, it's fine!"

"Yes, sir, she's a crackerjack, and she's never been beaten yet in a fair race with boats of her class," Val rejoined.

"Why can't we swap boats?" demanded Mr. Manning, after a short pause, during which he had been looking at the "Spitfire's" fine lines, and Val noticed that Carroll and Jim had furled

the sails and were putting off in the tender. " Say, you aren't afraid of gasoline? "

" Perhaps Mr. Brandon has never been blown up yet," suggested Miss Dorothy. " That makes some difference."

" What is your proposition? " asked Val, as he smiled at the last speaker.

" The ' Screamer ' was new last year, and the builders say they got twenty-two hundred for her. I paid Captain Roderick fifteen hundred for her just as she stands. Now what's your boat worth? "

" She was built a year ago last spring for my cousin, and I took her off his hands for seventeen hundred, all rigged and fitted out. Since then I have made some improvements in her, so now she stands me about eighteen hundred dollars, and she's just as sound as ever."

" I'll swap and give you five hundred dollars to boot," cried Mr. Manning instantly.

The skipper of the " Spitfire " looked at the speaker in surprise, and at that moment Carroll and Jim arrived in the tender.

" What do you think, boys," cried Val. " Mr. Manning wants to swap boats, and will give me five hundred to boot."

" Is he a philanthropist dying to get rid of his money? " inquired Jim, after acknowledging with Carroll an introduction to Miss Dorothy. " If he is, I think I'd give him a chance."

“What do you say, Cal?”

“Would I swap?” laughed that youth. “I’d swap so quick you’d think I’d always been swapped.”

“Are you willing to change over to the ‘Screamer,’ Sum?”

“You just try me once,” was the decided reply.

“That settles it,” said Val. “I’ll swap on your terms, Mr. Manning; give you the ‘Spit-fire’ with everything that really belongs to her, tender and all, for the ‘Screamer’ with her tender and all the fittings and furnishings that go with her, and five hundred dollars.”

“Excepting the lunch,” exclaimed Dorothy. “Goodness, I’d forgotten the lunch. You can’t have all of that.”

“It’s nearly lunch time now,” said Grace. “I think the easiest way to settle that question is for us all to go aboard and eat that lunch right up. I’m awfully hungry, and there’s enough for a dozen in the ice-chest.”

So they all went aboard the “Screamer” and ate up the lunch.

CHAPTER XI

THE EXPEDITION PAUSES

LUNCH was scarcely disposed of when Mr. Manning insisted upon taking his departure.

"I must change my clothes and return these to Mr. Morse," said he, "and besides that, there is a check to be drawn for Mr. Brandon, and we ought to draw up bills of sale to exchange with each other."

Val acquiesced in this suggestion.

"We'll move our stuff from the yacht at once," said he, "and leave everything snug, and tie the tender here at the float."

This was satisfactory to Mr. Manning and he departed; but the boys insisted that the girls stay aboard the "Screamer" while the transfer was made, and merrily declared they must not allow anything belonging to the Manning family to be carried off on the motor-boat if they could prevent it.

The "Screamer" ran out alongside the sloop again, and, amid a good deal of fun and laughter, all the cruising and camp equipment that had

been stowed away on the "Spitfire" was transferred to the other boat. Then everything was made snug on the yacht and she was left safely anchored, while with much regret the boys said good-bye to their old friend, and put back to the landing.

"And now the next time we meet out sailing it will be *you* who will be getting blown up and afire, and *we* who will hurry to your rescue and fish you out of the water," declared Dorothy.

"I'd almost be willing to be blown up under those conditions," said Val, gallantly, as he and Carroll assisted the ladies to the wharf, leaving Jim and Sumner in charge of the motor-boat; for the captain had to see about gasoline and cylinder oil, and sundry other supplies, as well as the five hundred dollar check and the bills of sale. As for Carroll, why, he must go and get the suit of clothes he had loaned Mr. Manning, and he carried a bundle containing the garments that gentleman had discarded after his mishap. So they strolled leisurely up the wharf — Carroll with the girl in blue, and Val with the girl in white.

"Jim, we simply aren't in it," asserted Sumner, as they got out some cotton waste and began to wipe up the cabin woodwork, and otherwise efface the effects of the smoke. "Our officers have captured all the girls in sight and left the crew to their lonesomes."

"I guess I can stand it," Jim laughed. "I

came after treasure on this cruise; I don't have to come 'way to Maine after girls, for the house is full of 'em when Sis is there. What I am wondering is how soon we'll see that gasoline if the officers don't walk faster than they're going now! "

They had scarcely finished the cleaning when the steamer "Mermaid" whistled for the landing, and presently tied up a short distance from the "Screamer." Her decks were filled with passengers, and somewhere among them a hand-organ was busy, for the strains of "In the Good Old Summer Time" were audible.

"I see the musician," remarked Jim, presently, for they had come out into the cockpit to look at the steamer and the people. "He's got a monkey, too, dancing 'round on the end of a string."

"Hey, there! Are you the fellows that want this gasoline and oil?" inquired a voice over their heads, and the boys looked up to find that an express wagon, in the back of which a blue barrel was visible, had driven down the wharf and stopped at the head of the steps. On receiving an affirmative answer the driver backed his team up near the edge, and laid a skid up to the back of the wagon on which to roll down the barrel of gasoline. Having adjusted this to his satisfaction, he tipped the barrel over on its side and was about to ease it down the incline when a

sudden uproar burst forth on the "Mermaid's" upper deck. It began with a feminine shriek, which was immediately supplemented by the guttural tones of a man whose anger was rising.

"Oh, that monkey took my pocket-book!" cried the female voice. "Catch him! Catch that monkey! He took my pocket-book!"

"Coma-here you Jock!" broke out the voice of the organ-grinder, angrily. Evidently he gave the monkey's cord a stiff jerk, for there was a shrill protest from the animal. And then tumult arose, for the cord had broken and the monkey was at large.

Jim and Sumner ran forward to the bow for a better view, while the teamster stopped his unloading to see what the matter was. But now the uproar and confusion on the "Mermaid" was so great that it was hard to tell just what was happening. An object appeared to be skurrying about on the upper deck, and various people were either grabbing for it or dodging out of its way. Soon it reached the rail, climbed down the deck supports, and leaped to the wharf. It was a small, black-eyed Java monkey; but he was not permitted to stay there in peace. The commotion among the passengers continued. In a moment several people rushed across the gang-plank to the wharf, headed by a distracted woman and the organ-grinder minus his organ, which he had dropped on the deck.

For the instant the monkey was disconcerted, but when the woman made a reach for him he regained his wits and went loping up the wharf. Everybody that was able to do so immediately started in pursuit.

"Stop him! Stop him!" cried the woman, seeing the team and the driver just ahead. "That monkey's got my pocket-book!"

"Monkeys are a little out of my line," remarked the man, with a grin, "but I always try to oblige the ladies." And he made an attempt to head off the animal; but the monkey was more afraid of the outcry in the rear than he was of the man ahead. He eluded the outstretched hands, dodged between the man's legs, and skurried up into the wagon, where he crouched under the seat.

"Ha! Would you hide, you heathen?" cried the teamster, reaching into the wagon.

But the monkey decided not to hide. Slipping out from under the seat, he gave a leap and landed fairly on the horse's back. That animal, being possessed of more spirit than sometimes falls to the portion of a delivery-wagon horse, gave a snort and a tremendous jump, and galloped away up the wharf with the driverless wagon behind and the monkey clinging for dear life to the harness.

When the wagon started the skid fell down and the barrel of gasoline went down on top of it.

Bumpety-bump down the steps went the barrel, and rolled swiftly across the float. Narrowly missing the stern of the "Screamer" and the boys who were hurrying to the scene of the disturbance, it splashed into the water and disappeared.

"Good gosh!" cried Jim. "Get the boat-hook, Sum! There goes ten dollars' worth of gasoline! You can get it easy enough, can't you? Of course you can. I'm going to see what becomes of that monkey!" And he ran up the steps and joined the procession that was streaming shoreward.

"Isn't that the limit?" grumbled Sumner, as he secured a boat-hook from the "Screamer" and proceeded to fish for the gasoline. And in his haste and the excitement of the moment, for he, too, wanted to see what became of the monkey, Sumner overreached himself and went in head-first, ker-souse!

"Just wait till I get hold of that Jim Hilton," he sputtered as he came to the surface and blew the water from his nose and mouth. But he found the barrel of gasoline, which, after all, was the object of his search; for, much to his surprise, it came to the top and floated.

Jim Hilton's active legs soon carried him to the head of the crowd that was chasing the monkey, but he couldn't catch the galloping horse. The leaders of the procession consisted of the woman

who had lost the pocket-book, the organ-grinder, and the teamster, and they were hurrying along at top speed.

As for the monkey, he soon became very dissatisfied with his position on the horse. After clinging there till the team reached the head of the wharf, he made a flying leap for safety without really looking where he was going to land. The result was that he disembarked at a fruit, confectionery and small-wares store which had a counter opening on the narrow sidewalk. The proprietor of this emporium was an enterprising young man who carried several lines of goods for the summer trade; among them being ice-cold lemonade contained in a huge punch-bowl that occupied the center of the counter, the surface alluringly bedecked with slices of lemon. He also kept confectionery, and had a big stand of souvenir post-cards.

For the storekeeper everything happened at once, just as things do in a railway collision. The monkey leaped from the horse, and landed with a great splash squarely in the punch-bowl. A tidal wave of lemonade seemed to sweep the counter, while the monkey, still dissatisfied with his situation, scrambled out of the bowl, dodged a vicious clip from the storekeeper — thus overturning and scattering the stand of post-cards — and scurried up the street into the village. With wrath in his heart, the proprietor seized the first

object within reach. It happened to be an egg from a dish near the soda fountain, and he threw it with great vigor at the monkey just as the leaders of the pursuing column went past. But his aim was wild, and the egg hit the teamster on the head and smashed.

It was lucky for the storekeeper that the teamster was in too big a hurry to stop, for he was mad enough to smash all of the store the monkey had left; but he ran on with the egg trickling down inside his collar, and the procession swept forward.

Of course most of the crowd went along purely out of curiosity, but a few of them were in deadly earnest, and when the storekeeper seized a revolver and joined the rush the number was increased by one very energetic fellow. He reached the leaders in short order.

"Look out!" he shouted, brandishing his weapon. "Get out of the way ahead, there! I'm going to shoot that darned little cuss!"

The Italian instantly turned on him savagely.

"No shoota da monk!" he cried in a rage. "Don'ta you dare shoota da monk! You shoota da monk, I keel you!" He sprang at the storekeeper; the two clinched, swayed violently for a moment, and fell sprawling in the dusty street. But willing hands soon separated them, and they rose with angry looks at each other, and continued the chase.

Back a short distance from the steamer landing stood the "Sebasco Inn," an old two-and-a-half story house, to which had been added a veranda on one side and the end toward the street. Once it had been a substantial farmhouse and the barn was close by at the rear, and adorned with a sign which said, "Horses Baited Here."

When the monkey had come this far he left the road, climbed on the railing of the Inn veranda, and scrambled up a post to the veranda roof. And then the crowd arrived. The earnest remarks of the woman and the Italian were so plainly unfriendly that the monkey kept on climbing, and this time it was up a flag-pole that rose from the middle of the veranda roof. He stuck to this till he had risen as high as the ridge of the house, and then scrambled across on an iron brace and gained the ridgepole. With every foot of additional height he attained he seemed to gain added confidence in himself; and now as he danced along the ridge he grimaced unconcernedly at the throng below, and was quite unmoved by either the threats of his owner or of the woman.

"Coma here, you Jock! You coma here, I tella you!" But English was inadequate and the grinder burst forth in a stream of vituperative Italian that no one but himself could understand.

The monkey presently sat down gingerly on the saddle-boards; suddenly discovered a flea

on himself — found and investigated it; scratched the place in a thoughtful mood. He grimaced again at the crowd, screwing up his beady eyes comically; and then put one paw into the pocket of his red jacket and pulled out a small bead purse.

“That’s it! That’s mine!” instantly declared the woman.

Meanwhile the crowd kept growing. One would not have supposed there were so many people in Harpsboro, even in the summertime; and to crown all, a load of hay drove into the hotel yard — bound for the barn — and the driver halted his oxen right in the midst of things so that he, too, could see what was going on.

“Why don’t you go up inside and climb out the scuttle and catch your goldarned old monkey?” he suggested to the Italian; but his admonition fell on unheeding ears, for the grinder, the woman, and everyone else were now intently watching the movements of the animal on the roof.

He examined the purse all over very carefully; felt of it with his teeth; and, at last, quite by accident, opened it. This was a surprise, but now it stimulated him to further investigations, and one by one he pulled out the contents.

There was small change, and this he didn’t intend to lose, but some of it slipped from his clutches and went rolling down the shingles and off into the crowd, where the youngsters im-

mediately pounced upon it despite the frantic efforts of the owner. Then he pulled out a green-back, unfolded it with his teeth and one hand, scrutinized it critically and tucked it carefully into his pocket.

“Ten dollars!” groaned the woman. “And the next thing is my diamond locket!”

Meanwhile different ones in the crowd suggested all sorts of schemes to capture the monkey, or, at least, to get hold of the pocket-book. No one seemed to really want the monkey except the Italian, though possibly the lemonade-stand man might have enjoyed a closer meeting, for he stood looking on with blood in his eye. As for the teamster, he had gone on farther in search of the runaway team.

The chief suggestion was a ladder, but none seemed obtainable; at this juncture, however, the driver of the ox-team left his load standing in the yard, ran into the house and upstairs, and just as the monkey took from the purse the last object it contained, — a small gold locket with slender chain, — a scuttle opened close by and the hay-maker, armed with a pitch-fork, emerged upon the roof. The monkey was certainly surprised, and he retreated toward the flagpole in alarm. In his haste he dropped the purse and the locket, and the former went kiting down the slope and shot off into the crowd — where its owner regained it; but the locket slid down for a

dozen feet or so, until the chain caught on a protruding shingle nail and stopped it.

"You get it, Bill!" cried a number of voices in the crowd. "Come on, Bill! It's up to you now! Help the lady, Bill!"

Bill, willing to accommodate, straddled the saddleboards and worked himself along abreast of the locket. Then he reached cautiously down with the pitchfork. No use. Then he swung around, and, lying on his stomach, stretched as far down as he possibly could with his implement, but still he couldn't reach that tantalizing golden object.

At this instant Jim Hilton, who had been an interested onlooker, left the crowd abruptly and raced toward the wharf. He hurried aboard the "Screamer" and encountered Sumner changing his clothes.

"Oh, you thought you'd come back, did you?" inquired the latter, in high dudgeon. "You're a good one, you are —"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Jim in astonishment, as he unlocked and opened "The Kit."

"—to leave me to fish for that confounded barrel of gasoline," went on Sumner in a distinctly aggrieved tone. "And it might have gone to the bottom for all you knew."

"Of course it wouldn't go to the bottom," returned Jim, who had pulled out a pair of tele-

graph linemen's climbers, and, without wasting a moment, proceeded to strap them on. "You know yourself that the specific gravity of gasoline is much less than that of water," he went on, with the air of a schoolmaster, "consequently it would be utterly impossible for that gasoline to sink. It would be bound to float."

"I guess specific gravity didn't help me out much," grumbled Sumner.

"Why, what happened to you?" Jim had his climbers strapped on and was getting down to the float.

"I fell in, that's what; and you'd better gravitate out of here till I feel better, Jim Hilton, for I don't love you very much just now." And Sumner's usually good-natured face wore an indignant frown.

"I'm awfully sorry," declared Jim. "I didn't mean any harm; you'll feel better when you get some dry clothes on, and then you'd better hurry up to the Sebasco Inn, for there's something doing up there all right." And Jim ran up the steps two at a time and disappeared. Sumner hurried into the rest of his clothes, locked up the boat, and followed. When he reached the scene of the disturbance the haymaker had stopped trying to reach the locket with his pitchfork; he had descended and secured a number of stones and small pieces of wood, with which he tried to dislodge the locket; but in his excitement he

could not hit it, while everything he threw fell with force into the crowd and raised a storm of protest.

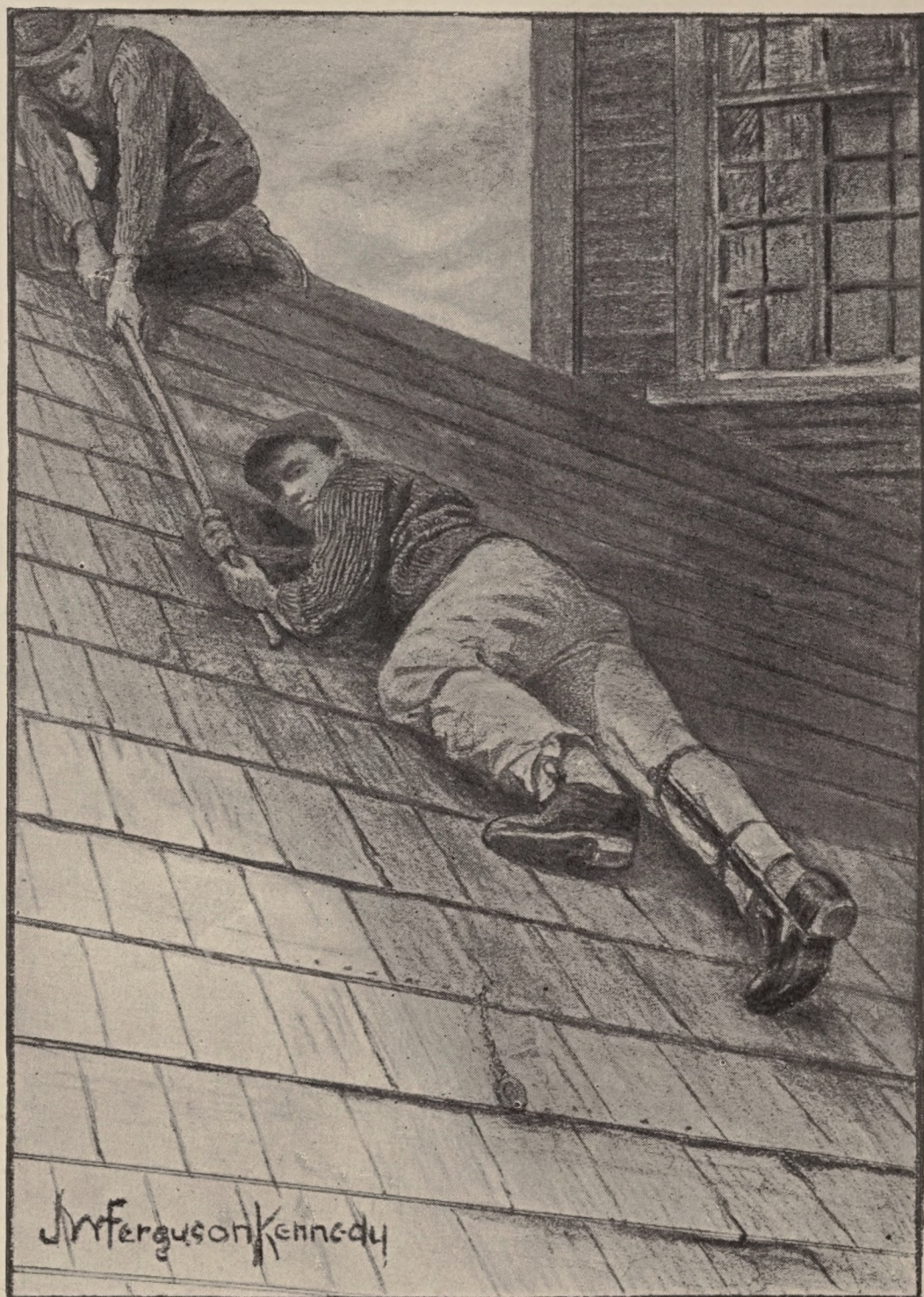
And then Jim Hilton, with climbers adjusted, got out of the scuttle upon the roof. Creeping along to the side of the man with the pitchfork, he began cautiously to descend the slope toward the locket, jabbing his spurs into the shingles as he did so. It was slow business, for he had to work down backwards and flatten the inner sides of his feet against the shingles to get a hold.

The crowd hailed his advent with great enthusiasm.

"Here, you young feller," cried Bill, when he realized what was going on. "If you're going to try any funny business like that, you take a good holt of this pitchfork handle."

So, holding to the end of the pitchfork handle while Bill held the tines, step by step Jim crept down the incline. Below, the murmur of the crowd was hushed. Some of them worked their way out of immediate range, for spurs and the fork-handle seemed slight aids to keep Jim from sliding off into the yard, and they didn't care to be underneath if he did fall. But without mishap he reached the locket and pocketed it.

"Good boy, Jim!" rang out in clear girlish tones at that instant. It was the voice of Madge Hilton, who with her cousin Vic — otherwise Victoria — Whitcomb, Dorothy and Grace Man-



"STEP BY STEP JIM CREPT DOWN THE INCLINE."

ning and Val and Carroll, had been attracted to the spot by the crowd while on their way to the " Screamer " to give Jim a surprise.

It surely was a surprise for Jim, who supposed his sister was at Southport, twenty odd miles away. He turned involuntarily to look, one of his spurs slipped, and as he suddenly swung side-wise he gripped the fork-handle tightly. But Bill on the ridgepole was not anticipating the sudden pull, and he let the tines slip through his fingers. Then, amid exclamations of horror from the on-lookers, with the pitchfork held in a desperate clasp and trying vainly to make his loose spur catch, Jim swung abruptly around, and, sliding faster and faster down the slope, shot head-first off the eaves into midair!

CHAPTER XII

AT HARPSBORO

UNDER different conditions it would have been laughable to see the crowd in the yard of the Sebasco Inn push and scramble to get out of the way when Jim Hilton slid off the roof. A kind Providence, however, had provided Jim's alighting place. He has a confused impression of a sea of startled faces looking up at him; then he swished through the air and landed on his stomach, shaken but unhurt, on top of the load of hay!

Everybody heaved an audible sigh of relief — everyone but the organ-grinder, whose monkey was still on the ridgepole, and the woman. As for the latter, no sooner had Jim landed than she pushed her way to the hayrack. She was not an uncomely person, and was well-dressed; but her chin was a firm one and her lips were compressed tightly into a thin straight line.

"Where are my locket and chain, young man?" she demanded in an uncompromising tone.

Sumner, pressing his way through the crowd,

came face to face with her, gasped in astonished recognition, and backed abruptly out of her sight. Jim picked himself up, made sure no bones were broken, and slid to the ground.

"Here they are, madam," he said, bowing politely as he handed over the jewelry.

"Hm! I'm much obliged." She examined her property critically. "There was a diamond set in the side of the locket. Where is it?"

Jim's face had been white, but it began to flush.

"Was there?" he asked. He dug down into his pocket and turned it wrongside out, but there was no diamond there.

"It certainly was there before, and it certainly is not there now!" declared the thin lips.

The flush on Jim's face grew into deep red.

"I hope you don't think I kept it," he said, controlling himself with a great effort.

"Then where is it?" was the sharp query.

"Madam," said Jim, with firmness, "I don't know where your diamond is. I don't even know that you had one. If you want to hunt, try the roof, or the hayrack. And if I had known what an awfully disagreeable person you are your old locket might have rotted up there for all of me."

Jim evidently had the sympathies of the crowd, for a burst of laughter greeted this sally, and he seized the opportunity to push his way out of the jam and join his sister and friends who were

trying to get at him. Sumner came along behind him, chuckling.

"Oh, Jim," he exclaimed, "I'll forgive you for leaving me to handle the gasoline after the hot liner you gave that woman. She's the most unreasonable woman you ever saw, but, by gum, we're square with her at last!"

"Why, do you know her?" chorused the party.

"Well, I should say I do. That's Mrs. Chadwick — she lives in South Stroudport."

"Huh, you may think you're square," retorted Jim, as he felt gingerly of sundry portions of his anatomy that had suffered in his recent experience, "but you didn't slide lickety-split down a splintery roof in a pair of mighty thin trousers! And now she says I stole her old diamond. Me square? Not much!"

They did not wait to see how Mrs. Chadwick adjusted matters with the organ-grinder — for now she proceeded to demand satisfaction from him, and so did the storekeeper. Between them both, with his monkey out of reach and his organ carried off on the "Mermaid," the poor fellow was fairly beside himself. Madge and Vic were anxious to inspect the "Screamer," so they all went down on board, feeling quite subdued after all, for they knew, despite the fortunate ending of the affair, that Jim had been in grave danger.

After the "Screamer" had been examined and admired from one end to the other, and there had

been much pleasant conversation about this and that, the four young ladies departed, but Dorothy and Grace left behind an urgent invitation for the young men to be at the Manning tea-table at five-thirty sharp, and to bring the mandolins and the banjo, "for we want to have some music, you know, and there will be a dandy moon." Madge and Vic were to come to supper, also. It was Mr. Manning's attempt to express to the boys in a small way the obligation under which he felt himself for the service they had rendered.

Val checked off one by one the items on his memorandum. The gasoline barrel, around which Sumner had merely tied a rope, and left it floating fastened to the landing, had been tapped and hoisted up on one of the davits, so that by aid of a short hose it was emptying its contents into the tank forward. The cylinder oil had been brought back and delivered when the teamster caught his runaway steed. "Ice will be delivered early to-morrow morning, so we'll start with the chest full, if we never get another scrap during the cruise. Milk — that comes in the morning. Strawberries — they're in the ice-chest. Kerosene for the blue-flame stove — that's on board. And we've got the fresh water tank under the cockpit chock full."

The change from the "Spitfire" to the "Screamer," although it involved a different kind of motive power, would cause no change

in the sailing schedule. On the next day Carroll and Jim would sail the boat, and Val and Sumner cook and tidy up.

"Fellows," remarked Carroll, "it seems to me we ought to be getting out of this place pretty early in the morning."

"Six o'clock, sure," said Val.

"Why not start to-night?" questioned Jim. "The moon will be almost full — it'll be fine for sailing. Besides, boys, I've got a hunch —"

"Have you had another dream?" Sumner asked, with a reminiscent grin.

"Oh, slush!" retorted Jim, "you make me weary. Now if I hadn't had that dream down at Codville last summer you know as well as I do that we would never have gone over to Stone Horse Island and found the cipher, and then where would this expedition have been?"

"Oh, well, if that's the way you feel about it, all right."

"I've got a hunch," Jim went on, "that if we don't hurry, something is going to happen — somebody'll get ahead of us."

"Does anybody really want to start to-night?" demanded Carroll, grinning broadly at Val, who discreetly said nothing. "If everybody says go, why, we'll do it."

"We can't go," declared Sumner. "We have a previous engagement."

"That's so," said Jim, reflectively, but whether

his mind's eye saw blue eyes or brown he did not say. "I would like to see Madge once more before we start, honest now."

There was a chorus of ha-ha's from the others, but they let it go at that.

"Honest, I kind of hate to tell about it," said Sumner apologetically. "It makes me all hot inside just to think about it."

Sumner was seated in a comfortable piazza chair, and so were the rest of the eight, together with Mr. and Mrs. Manning, on the broad veranda of the Mannings' summer home. The supper had been one to satisfy the most fastidious, and the host and hostess and their two daughters had done the honors most cordially and pleasantly for the youths who had been brought into their lives in so unusual a manner.

The Mannings' cottage faced the water to the eastward, and when they presently emerged from the house to the veranda, the moon was shining down and tipping the ripples of the sound with gleamings of silver.

At first everybody felt too full to sing, so they chatted awhile, and suddenly Carroll asked Sumner why he had such a grudge against Mrs. Chadwick; and why he had been so secret the night they chased the man through the Chadwick yard. Sumner hesitated.

"Never mind," said Madge, encouragingly. "If

you have anything to confess, now's the time; besides, if you are harboring a grudge you ought to get it right out of your system."

Sumner briefly explained who Mrs. Chadwick was, and that her property backed up to that of his friend Captain Bucklin.

"One day two years ago last spring Harry Chadwick and I were playing ball out in his garden, and I tried to knock a fly for him to catch; but it turned out to be a liner. Well, he missed it, of course — he's a regular butter-fingers, anyhow — and it went, smash! right through his mother's dining room window!"

"And you had to settle?" said Carroll.

"Settle!" Sumner's voice was edged with fine irony.

"There was a big yellow cat on the inside window sill," he continued. "She didn't get hurt, but the ball hit and busted an aquarium and the water and a lot of goldfish ran out on the carpet, and the cat had a fine meal off the fish — that is, she had made a good start when Harry's mother got there."

A roar of laughter went up at this point.

"Was she very mad?" asked Mrs. Manning.

"Yes, ma'am; why she was so mad she *hopped!* Oh really, I hate to think about it. But how was I to know she had that aquarium there?" he demanded. "And 'twasn't my fault her cat liked fish, was it? Well, not hardly, and I told

her so. But she's an awfully unreasonable person — isn't she, Jim? — and ever since then I always try to keep away from her."

A fresh and more prolonged roar of laughter greeted this assertion.

"Was that all there was to it?" asked Dorothy, when they had regained their breath a little.

"Pretty near, except that the water ran the red color in the carpet and it leaked down through the floor into the basement. And what do you think? She had some sheets drying on a line down there, and the red water dripped on 'em and made 'em all streaky like. But I'm sure I couldn't have known her old carpet wouldn't stand water or that the washing was hanging up down cellar, now could I?"

The others mechanically shook their heads — they couldn't speak.

"Did you pay up?" again asked Carroll, after a pause.

"I had ten dollars saved to buy a self-inking printing press; but I had to give it up to repair the damages. She is so awfully unreasonable; why, nothing I could say would make her believe it was Harry's fault because he muffed the ball. And after that I didn't want to get a printing press because I knew every time I used it I'd think of that woman."

After this diverting narrative was finished the boys tuned up the mandolins and the banjo; and

they all sang — sang everything they could think of; all the popular songs, and college songs, and the good oldtime songs. It was a night for romance, there in the radiance of the summer moon, with the gleaming water in front, and the lights of Little Sebasco in the distance. Jim might have been anxious to see his sister once more before the “ Screamer ” sailed, but now he had certainly confused her identity with that of Vic Whitcomb; while Sumner had entirely forgotten the cause of his embarrassment at Cod Island the summer before, and his chair seemed determined to keep bumping Madge Hilton’s. Carroll was near Grace, and Val was not so very far away from Dorothy; while Mr. and Mrs. Manning were holding hands and joining in the singing, as they gazed pensively across the moonlit sea.

Presently Val, who had a really good tenor voice, began a soft accompaniment on his mandolin, and sang that beautiful song, “ On Venice Waters.” And when he reached the chorus, Cal, Jim and Sumner joined in:

“ Over the foam we glide, borne on the rippling tide,
Under the dreamy summer skies,
Watching the mists around us rise;
What tho’ the world be wide, love’s golden star will guide,
Drifting along, glad is our song, while we are side by side.”

There was a burst of applause from the others as the song ended, and then the party broke up.

“ We’ll run up past here and give you a salute — six A. M. sharp,” declared Val, as they said good-bye. “ Will anyone be on deck so early? ”

“ Early! ” protested Dorothy. “ Why six o’clock is the middle of the forenoon.” And then they laughed, but the girls all agreed to be out to wave the “ Screamer ” a good-bye.

It was ten-thirty when the boys boarded the motor-boat, and they didn’t lose any time in turning in. It was cool and breezy down there on the water, so they locked the companion doors, leaving the slide open, opened all the ports and the skylight, and retired.

“ Say, but she’s got a mighty roguish pair of brown eyes, hasn’t she, Cal? ” murmured Sumner, sleepily, from his bunk as quiet settled down on the boat.

“ Don’t talk to him about brown eyes,” said Val. “ All Cal can see is blue eyes and golden hair.”

But to this badinage Carroll made no reply. He was all at once very soundly asleep; and as for Jim, if he could see eyes of any color it was in dreamland.

It was half-past-five when they came back to consciousness, and it was a bumpety-bump alongside that aroused them, not the daylight, for the sun had been above the horizon over an hour.

“ A-a-all hands! ” cried Val, loudly, and as the others sat up yawning, he poked his head out of

the companion to see what had caused the disturbance. There was the "Ginger" tied up at the other end of the float, and in her were Rad Conway and Alf Richardson.

"Go back to bed, you disturbers of the peace," he called. Rad and Alf were distinctly surprised. They left their boat and boarded the "Screamer."

"Who belongs to it?" demanded Rad, indicating the boat.

"I do," said Val, and explained how he got her.

"Well, I'll be jiggered; I thought you were married to that sloop-yacht," Alf declared. "Will she go any?"

"Oh, I guess we can squeeze nine or ten miles out of her, even when she's loaded for cruising." Which was true enough!

"Who'd you swap with?" asked Rad, as he looked the boat over.

"A Mr. Manning — he bought her of Captain Roderick."

"Where did Roderick get her?"

"I think he bought her in Boston; anyhow she came from there. She was built at Lawley's a year ago last spring."

Rad leaned over and whispered in Alf's ear.

"Say, I'll bet this is the boat that was —"

"What are you whispering about?" Val demanded, in mock curiosity.

"Oh, nothing much," said Rad, in a rather

embarrassed manner. Whatever his remark may have been, he did not complete it, for as Val talked he had been dressing, as had the others, and the transom beds having been made up for the day, the visitors were invited to inspect the boat's interior.

"Let me tell you two fellows, that was a dastardly insult you handed out to us yesterday morning," remarked Carroll, with a good-natured grin, "an insult to be wiped out only in blood! What are you doing 'round here, anyway?"

"We ran in late last evening and stopped over night at the Sebasco Inn," replied Rad. "I'm giving Alf a little vacation."

"Say, did Mrs. Chadwick find her diamond?" asked Sumner.

"And did the monkey come down?" from Jim.

"Are you the fellow that slid off the roof?" demanded Rad. "'Cause if you are you had a narrow escape with your life. I don't mean when you fell into the hay, but from that woman. She raved 'round there like a crazy person for over ten minutes, and then what do you think? She found that miserable little diamond in the purse. It had come unset and been there all the time. Then, after the crowd went away, the grinder coaxed the monkey down, and gave back the ten dollar bill; and he patched up with the lemonade man by paying him a dollar."

As it was now evident that the "Screamer" was ready to start, the visitors disembarked. Hasty good-byes were exchanged, and while Val and Sumner pulled in the lines, Jim started the engine and the cruise in the "Screamer" was really begun.

"We'll be back this way in a few minutes," called Val. "If your eyesight is good you may be able to see us as we go by."

Up the sound they headed, and after a short run came around in a sweeping curve in front of the Manning cottage.

"Let her go, Sum!" cried Val, and then the breechloading brass cannon, which had fired many a salute from the deck of the "Spitfire," barked loudly.

"Bang!"

"That's one. Give her another — we want six of those, one for Mr. Manning, one for Mrs. Manning, and one for each of the girls."

"Bang!" Sumner threw open the breechblock, extracted the empty shell and reloaded as rapidly as possible.

"Bang!"

"There's somebody!" cried Jim. "It's the Manning girls, and they're waving to beat the band."

"Bang!"

"There's Madge and Vic, over at their house," exclaimed Carroll, as two girls appeared over on

the next veranda, and ran down to the top of the high bank above the beach.

“Bang!”

“Hurrah!” said Val. “There are Mr. and Mrs. Manning, as sure as I’m alive, and Mrs. Manning is waving a flag.”

“Bang!”

This ended the salutes. During this time the engine had been turning free, but as the last discharge sounded Carroll threw in the clutch, and the “Screamer” started down the sound, while the party on shore and the party aboard waved vigorously at each other. It was an auspicious departure.

As they ran down toward the steamboat wharf another boat shot out into the channel.

“Jim Hilton,” called Carroll from the steering wheel to his engineer below. “If you know as much about gasoline engines as you say you do, now’s your time to make good. Tune her up and keep her tuned, for Rad Conway is after our scalps in the ‘Ginger.’”

“He wants to see us ‘squeeze nine or ten miles’ out of her, and then give us the haha when he goes by, same as he did yesterday with the ‘Spitfire,’” declared Val, poking his head out of the galley where he and Sum were preparing breakfast.

“I dreamed we raced the ‘Ginger,’” asserted Jim, as he bent over the engine, and oiled up

carefully, adjusting the machine to a nicety until it talked out an even, unbroken stream of "Chi-chi-chi-chi!"

"Did we beat her?" demanded Sumner, pausing in the act of slicing a potato.

"Give it up," was the rueful reply. "I woke up in the middle of it. But if we don't, it won't be because I don't handle the engine the best I know how. It'll be because the machinery can't come up to the scratch."

And then the three below decks could stand the pressure no longer, and hurried up.

"I guess we can wait for breakfast," Val commented. "If we're going to have a race — where is the 'Ginger'? Oh, she's loafing along at half speed. Better close those starboard port-holes, Sum. We may get some spray aboard if we don't. The wind is southerly, and we'll get it rather quartering."

And then they lapped the "Ginger's" stern, and the race was on, for before they came abreast Rad Conway had started his engine at full speed.

It was a glorious morning for a race — it was a grand morning just to be alive. As far ahead as the eye could reach the waters of the Atlantic glistened under the clear July sun as they came rippling in before the southerly wind. The tide was slack, — just at the turn of the ebb, — and islands on either side loomed high in the morning light with their sea-weed-laden rocks laid bare

by the low water. Two miles ahead was the red buoy on Turnip Island Ledge, and toward this both boats were racing.

Down the long reach the motor-boats held on. Their muffled exhausts puffed with the regularity of trip-hammers — trip-hammers wonderfully speeded up; and yet their relative positions changed not a hair. The bow of the "Screamer" lapped the stern of the "Ginger," and there it stayed. Such an example of exactly similar speeds in racing craft was rare; but to the boys on each boat it was exasperating as well.

"Jim, it's up to you to get us by that boat," cried Carroll, presently. "Jim, if it's in that old engine you've just *got* to get it out!"

The two boats were about fifty feet apart. On the "Ginger" Alf was at the wheel, his face set straight to the front; Rad was aft beside the engine. To look at them one would have thought they did not know such a craft as the "Screamer" existed.

On the "Screamer" Val and Sumner were taking it easy in the lazyback. They were trying to wear an air of indifference which they were far from feeling. Carroll kept his eyes on the bow and the red buoy away down channel which marked their turning point eastward. But Jim? At Carroll's insistent call he rushed down the companion steps and tackled the engine. The spark was a dandy fat one; the gasoline mixture

seemed to be just right. How about the water circulation in the cylinder jackets? He felt of the cylinders one after another. Aha! One was hot — very hot. Was the piston binding just the merest trifle? That circulation valve which had caused trouble for Mr. Manning the day before was trying to get in its deadly work again; but now Jim opened it wide, and the throttled water circulation, whose duty was to keep cooled to a working temperature the cylinder heated by the incessant explosions of gasoline gas, resumed its flow. In a few moments the cylinder was as cool as the others, and Jim, feeling that he had done all in his power, went into the cockpit.

“ I think we’re beginning to gain,” said Val, presently. And after a minute, “ Yes, boys, I’m sure of it; and Rad thinks we are, too. See him tinker his engine! ”

Onward and still on raced the motor-boats, their keen prows cutting the water like knives. Dashes of spray blown from the wave tops splashed over the bow, and spattered the eager racers with showers of gleaming drops, but they scarcely noticed them.

Slowly but surely the “ Screamer ” was creeping ahead! Slowly but surely the greater power of her engine coupled with the superiority of her hull’s design were winning out against the “ Ginger,” fine boat though the latter surely was.

Foot by foot the "Screamer" crept up on her antagonist. Now her bow was opposite the "Ginger's" midships, now it was passing the curve of her bow; now the two boats were neck and neck. Then the cruiser drew ahead, ahead, ahead. Val quietly brought out the megaphone; but he said nothing. He laughs best who laughs last, and races are sometimes won on curious flukes. It is never wise to crow till one is out of the woods; but when the "Screamer" had slowly but steadily pushed herself past the other boat, and a clear streak of water showed between them, Val raised the big speaking horn to his lips, for he could not resist the opportunity.

"I say, Rad," he called, with laughter in his voice, "if you're in a hurry to get anywhere in particular, give us your bowline and we'll take you in tow."

But Sumner, seized by sudden impulse, broke into song. "Join in, boys," he admonished, and they did.

Rad Conway, good-natured even in defeat, shook his fist at the "Screamer" as he gave up the race; but the last thing he heard from the victors as he headed back to Harpsboro was exasperating words loudly chanted to the tune of "America."

"There are no flies on us,
There are no flies on us,
No flies on us!

There may be one or two
Great big fat flies on you ;
There are no flies on us,
No flies on us."

"That was bully," declared Sumner, with great enthusiasm, as he resumed breakfast preparations, "and his hash is settled for good and all."

"What could he expect to do with nothing but a heap of junk to run his boat?" demanded Jim, loftily.

"Jimmy, you're all right; but he'll probably catch us sometime when our engine is gummed up and beat us out of our boots."

The high granite cliffs at the southern end of Whale Island were close on the port bow, and the "Screamer" was running at half speed, while the boys studied the chart and noted the surroundings carefully. Just before they passed the southwestern point they had seen on shore a group of buildings, one with a tall smokestack. In front of the latter building a wharf projected into the water and a steamer was tied up there.

"It's a big granite backbone, with trees here and there, and that's about all of Whale Island," was Carroll's verdict, in which the others, from their first impression, concurred.

As the directions gleaned from the ciphers told them to start from a cross on the eastern shore they had decided to find a suitable landing place

on that side and make a camp there. On the previous summer Val had been driven ashore in the steam-yacht "Sea Rover" on this island. The yacht by the merest chance had run ashore in a sandy cove, and it was determined to find this same cove, for it would afford good anchorage, and Val thought the shore would be suitable for the camp.

It was about two o'clock on the afternoon of the day they left Harpsboro. Soon after the "Screamer" turned the red buoy on Turnip Island Ledge Carroll had put her on a course nearly southwest by east. From there Whale Island was about sixty miles away, and the cruiser had reeled off the whole distance without a single hitch, averaging about ten miles an hour. Dinner had been cleared away when they got near enough to Whale Island to distinguish objects ashore, and now everyone was eagerly speculating on what they were about to find.

Smoke rose lazily from the stack near the landing, and several men were working near the factory. Except for this they had seen no signs of life on the island, which at its southern end was about a mile across. But as the "Screamer" moved at half-speed between the shore and a series of outlying ledges and small islands, Jim with the glass caught sight of a man on the beach, walking toward the east along the base of the cliffs.

He swept the face of the rock with the glass and saw something else. A second man was leaning over the top of the cliff, watching the one below. This second person was evidently somewhat in advance of the one on the lower level. He looked intently down for a moment while the other, unconscious of the scrutiny, kept advancing. Then he began to pry with furious energy at a good-sized boulder resting near the edge of the cliff.

All this had been hurriedly detailed to the others, but now they were close enough to see the figures plainly themselves.

"Good gosh!" ejaculated Jim. "That fellow up top is trying to drop that rock on the other one and smash him!"

Instantly everyone was on edge with excitement.

"No, he can't start that rock," Jim presently stated. "He's sneaking along the edge of the cliff, just ahead of the man below. See him?"

"Lordy, this is awful," cried Sumner. "Can't we do something, fellows?"

"Yes, if we can only get ashore in time," said Val. He picked up the megaphone and pointed it at the fellow on the beach. And just then the man above crept to the edge of the cliff, stood there an instant poising a large rock in his hands, and when the man below was directly underneath, dropped it.

But in that instant's pause, while the rock was poised over the brink, Val sent forth a stentorian call.

"Look up! Look up!" he said.

Neither of the men ashore had seen the approach of the "Screamer." The muffler was an effective one, and the scarcely noticeable puffing of the exhaust was drowned by the light surf.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Val's shout greatly surprised the man on the beach; but he looked up, saw something hurtling downward and jumped aside. He escaped the rock, but this in its fall struck the branches of a dead tree which projected from the face of the cliff. One of them fell with the rock, and hit squarely on his head, knocking him prostrate. The assailant, who had knelt to note the result of the attack, when he saw the motor-boat's approach hurriedly disappeared. An instant afterward the "Screamer" grounded on a pebbly beach.

CHAPTER XIII

IN CAMP

“ Is — is he — dead? ” whispered Sumner hesitatingly to Val, who was kneeling by the prostrate man and feeling of his heart.

“ No; only stunned,” was the quick reply. “ Just wet this handkerchief in the surf, will you, and let me have it? ” And presently Val was bathing the unconscious man’s forehead and temples, while Sumner and Jim looked on with much concern. Carroll was in charge of the “ Screamer.” At length the man gave a sigh and opened his eyes, and then Val recognized him.

“ Halloo, Captain Field,” he remarked; “ that came pretty near being your finish.”

The Captain of the “ Dorabelle ” looked about for a moment with a dazed expression. Then his head cleared a little and he tried to sit up.

“ Well, I’ll be hanged,” said he, as after several attempts he reached a sitting posture. “ I’d like to know who the darned skunk was that fired that rock down at me.”

He felt with painful solicitude of a rapidly rising lump on his head.

"Don't you know?" Sumner inquired. "Hadn't we better try to catch him, fellows?"

"Don't you bother," said the Captain, as he again felt his cranium over carefully. "He's got so fur by now that I'll bet none of us could find him. My head seems to be in one piece, yit," he went on, more cheerfully, "but I must say I am some shook up."

"Do you live 'round here?" Val asked.

"Wal, I hope not," responded the Captain, with more vigor in his tones than hitherto, as he rose unsteadily to his feet; "but that's my po'gy factory 'round the point, and the old 'Dora-belle' at the wharf."

"Ah," said Val, with a flash of understanding. He knew now why Fenderson, alias Pike, had given him Cheney Landing, the settlement at the north of the island, as his post-office address. "You'd better get aboard our boat, Captain, and let us land you at your wharf."

"I'd thank you kindly if you would," replied Field. He was evidently much shaken by his narrow escape from serious injury, although he tried not to show it.

There was no further conversation until they were on the "Screamer," which was backed off the beach after some effort, for the tide was ebbing, and headed for the landing at the factory.

"Nice boat you got here," remarked Field, eyeing the craft critically. "By the way, who are you fellows, anyhow?"

An amused smile played over Val's face. It was apparent the Captain had not recognized him after all, though perhaps his senses had been dulled by his mishap.

"We're from Stroudport, most of us. My name is Brandon —"

"Good Lord! Is that so?" exploded Field, sharply scrutinizing him. "Ain't I got rid of you yet?" he added, grimly.

"It seems not," retorted the young skipper. "How're the po'gies running in Saco Bay? Then this is Sumner Parker, and this is James Hilton and this man at the wheel is Carroll Morse."

The Captain looked as though he was going to have a fit. He started up suddenly, with a flush on his face.

"That's the fellow I'm a-looking for," he cried, stepping quickly toward Carroll. "Say, you young monkey, where's that boat you stole the other night?"

Now Carroll had been paying strict attention to steering and had not caught the name of the man who had been rescued; nor did he hear the conversation till Field bellowed out his last question. But he turned quickly enough when Field placed a heavy hand on his shoulder, and impatiently shook it off.

“What’s the matter with you, and who are you, anyhow?” he demanded.

“I’ll let you know who I am,” was the retort. “I’m Field, Captain of the ‘Dorabelle.’ Now where’s that boat you stole?”

“If you’re captain of a vessel you ought to know better than to bother the man at the wheel,” said Carroll, sharply. “Sit down and cool off, and I’ll tell you what became of that boat after we get clear of these shoals.”

This reply so surprised the Captain that he gasped and sat down again, while the rest chuckled.

“Don’t you know who threw the rock down at you?” asked Val, after a minute’s pause.

“If it had been last summer I’d have said it was a crazy man that lived ’round here awhile till they took him off to the Augusty asylum; but now I’m blamed if I have the least idea,” was the serious reply. “That fellow took to comin’ ’round the factory, and got to be such a nuisance that I drove him off sev’ral times, an’ then he took a grudge against me. But now he’s gone I hain’t got an enemy in the world so fur’s I know.” And it was apparent that the identity of his assailant was a great and unwelcome mystery to the Captain, and for some moments he pondered deeply. Then another subject claimed his attention, and just as the “Screamer” ran alongside the po’gy steamer he inquired sharply:

“Where be you fellows bound?”

“Just cruising,” was Val’s non-committal reply. “Is there a good chance to camp on this island? We might stop here a day or so if there’s any chance to pitch a tent, good water, and a safe anchorage. We don’t care to cruise all the time — the quarters get too cramped.”

The Captain looked keenly at his questioner a moment before answering.

“Wal,” he finally said, with a short laugh. “I don’t reckon you would want to camp ’round here while the fact’ry’s runnin’, and when the wind’s your way you’ll find out why. They ain’t no cottagers nearer than three miles up on either side. This end of the island is all trees and rocks and underbrush, and I don’t reely believe there’s a cove fit to anchor a lobster-pot in. You’d better go further up the island before you land.

“An’ now, Carroll Morse, tell me where that bo’t of mine is,” he demanded, for Carroll had stopped the propeller and throttled down the engine, and the motor-boat had made fast alongside the fishing steamer.

“Certainly,” was the quiet reply. “When we took that boat away we honestly believed that Pike had stolen it from Robertson’s cove, for he had already taken a valuable paper and a bicycle. We were halfway to shore when we found out it belonged to you; but before we had decided what to do about it the trouble broke out on the ‘Bay

Queen ' and we ran over to help. After that was over we went back to your anchorage, but you had sailed. That boat, Captain Field, is at the Stroudport Yacht Club wharf in care of the janitor, who has instructions to deliver it to you or your representative."

Somewhat to Carroll's surprise this explanation seemed to satisfy the Captain. He nodded in acquiescence, and climbed on board his steamer.

"I'm much obliged to you for helping me out, boys, I reely am," he called after the "Screamer," as she swung off and headed back the way she had come. Half an hour later she felt her way into a snug cove on the eastern side of the island, not more than half a mile from its southern end.

"How's this for an anchorage?" asked Val, cheerily. "And did you ever see a bigger storyteller than that same po'gy captain? Right up there to the right among those tall pines I'll bet there is the best kind of a camp-site." The others, after due inspection, agreed with him.

The davits were swung outboard, and for the first time since Val had owned the "Screamer" her tender was raised from its chocks and lowered into the water. Then they all went ashore to locate the camp.

"Almost exactly a year ago to-night I came ashore in this same cove on the 'Sea Rover,' in a fog, and with a crazy man at the wheel," said Val reminiscently, as they landed and climbed

the bank on the south side of the cove; "and I don't want any more of that in mine."

The three prime requisites for a camp were right at hand: water, fuel, and a dry, sheltered location. The cove was some hundred yards deep, and its mouth was so protected by outlying ledges that the deep-sea swell could not roll in unobstructed. It offered, therefore, an excellent anchorage for the "Screamer." Its head terminated at a shelving sand beach, down which a brook ran from the higher ground. This was clear and fresh, so they dug a hole in its course and left it to fill up. Both sides of the cove were wooded. The north side was a tangle of hardwood growth, for the most part, though there were some fir and spruce, while vines and briers grew rankly in the openings; but on the south side was a cluster of tall pines, their smooth trunks rising straight and clean, and not showing a branch for fifty feet.

These after a fashion surrounded the level top of a small knoll that rose from the edge of the cove and attained its full height a couple of rods back. The wall-tent was brought ashore; saplings cut and trimmed for the ridgepole and the supporting uprights; the necessary number of pegs cut and sharpened; and there on the needle-carpeted top of the knoll they made the camp. The tent was pitched with its front toward the sea, which was only a few hundred feet distant,

and plainly visible out between the pine trunks. The tent was provided with a double top, which was spread to afford added protection from the rain. Other saplings were cut, and a second piece of canvas spread for an awning just in front of the tent, it being the intention, if boards could be procured, to build a dining-table there. Since it was impossible to tell whether their stay would be long or short they brought ashore only the articles absolutely necessary for comfort. The blue-flame stove and a supply of kerosene for it, a moderate quantity of food, the transom cushions to serve as mattresses, four rubber blankets and twice the number of woolen, with some serviceable cushions for pillows. When these and other necessities had been landed, and the knoll began to look like a camp, it was after four o'clock; but the sun was still high and Val proposed that two of them take a walk along the shore toward the south, and prospect for the cross; the other two could remain to finish tidying the camp.

"You and Cal better go," urged Jim, "for Sum and I want to build a fireplace. There's a dandy place for one against this boulder here, and a camp without a campfire is no camp at all."

As all the really necessary work of camp building was done, Val and Carroll departed, and the others began collecting stones and building a

rough fireplace on one side of a huge rock that stood on the southerly edge of the knoll-top.

Though they had not been working long, yet the fireplace was beginning to assume definite proportions, when they heard a crackling among the underbrush near the head of the cove, and a man appeared and made his way to the top of the knoll. If he was surprised at seeing the tent and other camping paraphernalia he did not show it, but his countenance wore a frown, and he had no sooner caught sight of the boys than he began to talk in an unnecessarily loud tone. He was rather above medium height, thickset and muscular. He wore rubber boots, a pair of rough trousers of some dark material, and a dirty cotton shirt, while a slouch hat topped his head. His aspect was decidedly unfriendly, and Jim and Sumner desisted from their work in considerable astonishment when he appeared.

“What are you doing here?” he demanded.

“Building a fireplace,” replied Sumner. “A camp’s no good without a fire, you know.”

“That isn’t what I mean and you know it,” was the quick retort. “Who gave you leave to camp here?”

Jim and Sumner looked at each other apprehensively. It had not occurred to any of the boys that there could be a possible objection to their camping in such an out-of-the-way, rough, and deserted place as this.

“Come, come!” exclaimed the man roughly. “If you’ve got a permit to camp here let me see it.”

“Who are you, anyway?” demanded Jim, bristling at the other’s coarse manner. “What right have you to come ’round here and talk like this?”

“I’ll show you who I am,” was the retort. “This island belongs to Charles Vinal of Rockland, and he don’t allow any campers on it. I’m the man that has charge of this end of it. You campers seem to think you can butt in anywhere whether you’ve got permission or not; but you can’t stay here. I won’t be rough with you as you didn’t seem to know just how matters stood, but you’ve got to get out by to-morrow forenoon, or you’ll get yourselves into trouble.”

“Can’t we get a permit to camp here?” asked Jim. “We’d like very much to stay for a week or — ”

“No sir, you can’t; and I’ll tell you why. You fellows go to building fires ’round, go away and leave ’em carelessly, and the result is, a wind springs up, the sparks get scattered, and the whole woods get to blazing.”

“Huh,” grunted Sumner, rather incredulously. “Seems to me you got here pretty soon after we did. Who told you about us?”

The question was unexpected, and for a moment the newcomer seemed at a loss for a reply.

“Well — I — it’s my business to be looking

out for just such chaps as you, and I caught you. See? ”

“ Would you mind telling us your name? ” asked Sumner. “ You are this Mr. Vinal’s agent, are you? ”

“ Oh, my name’s Sanders,” replied the man, but his eye had lighted on the “ Screamer ” and his attention was attracted by her. “ Is that your boat? ” he queried.

“ She belongs to one of us,” vouchsafed Jim, rather crustily.

“ What do you call her? Is she fast? ”

“ A motor-boat cruiser — oh, she can do twelve, easy.”

Mr. Sanders walked down to the edge of the cove for a closer look. He inspected the craft with deep curiosity.

“ She certainly is a corker,” they heard him remark. “ Screamer — Screamer,” he mused. “ I say,” he exclaimed, “ that ain’t Dan Newton’s ‘ Screamer,’ is it? ”

“ Well, I guess *not*,” replied Sumner, decidedly. “ She’s Val Brandon’s ‘ Screamer.’ ”

Mr. Sanders looked thoughtfully at the boys and then at the motor-boat, spat forth a mouthful of tobacco-juice, and remarked:

“ Kind of odd, though, ain’t it, there should be two of them of the same name? Newton’s was a gasoline cruiser, and so’s yours.”

“ Oh, they turn ’em out by the trainload, now-

adays," returned Jim, impatiently, and 'Screamer' isn't such an uncommon name — not for a speedy boat. Who is this Newton, anyhow? "

" Why, he's — well, there, I don't know as I can tell you *that*. He was around Penobscot Bay last summer in a peach of a schooner-yacht — 'Penelope' her name was. He always seemed to have plenty of money — "

" 'Penelope,' did you say? " broke in Sumner, impelled by sudden recollection of a recent incident.

" Yes; why? "

" Say, is this Newton short and rather stout, and does he wear clothes so loud you can hear 'em a mile off? " From Sumner.

" No, that don't fit Newton at all. He's kind of tall, wears good clothes — a quiet sort of chap. Guess you don't know him. But what gets me is why you fellows want to settle down and camp out in a tent, when you've got a boat like that. Now if 'twas me I'd want to keep sailing all the time." He smiled suggestively.

" Perhaps so; but if you can go sailing any time you wish, you get tired of it and want a change," explained Jim.

" Now, Mr. Sanders," he went on in a persuasive tone, " all we want is permission to camp here for a week or two. You see, there's fresh water handy, and good anchorage — good fishing, good swimming, good place for the tent,

Why can't we make some arrangement with you? "

But the answer was sharp and decisive.

"No, sir! My orders are positive. I haven't got anything against you boys, but if you don't get out of here by to-morrow forenoon, I'll have to put you off."

With this parting shot Mr. Sanders departed, disappearing inland the way he had come. After a moment's deliberation Jim and Sumner resumed their work, and soon had finished a stone fireplace of generous proportions. They then took the hatchet and collected a large pile of dead wood.

"If this is to be our first, last, and only night on Whale Island," remarked Jim, "we'll have one good campfire in spite of Mr. Sanders."

Val and Carroll returned by six o'clock, and found supper nearly ready. They had made their way along the rough and rocky shore to the southeastern extremity of the island and back again, without seeing anything that remotely resembled a cross, either iron, stone, or wooden. Although the distance was short, the roughness of the ground had made it a tiresome tramp, and they dropped wearily into the chairs that had been brought from the "Screamer;" but when they heard of the visit of Mr. Sanders, they sat up in lively manner.

"And he ordered us to get out by to-morrow

forenoon?" said Val. "What sort of a person is this Sanders?"

Sumner described him.

"And he looked something like a fisherman — he smelt of fish, or something like that — didn't you think so, Jim?"

"I didn't get to loo'ard of him," remarked Jim, "but he was dirty enough to smell of most anything."

"You remember the night you went out to the 'Dorabelle,' Sum? Did you get a good sniff of her?" asked Val.

"Did I? Yes, sir, he smelt like that. I'll bet he's from that po'gy factory across the island."

"There's a nigger in the woodpile," agreed Carroll, sagely. "That was all poppycock about his being on the lookout for just such people as we. He got here too soon, and I'll bet Field sent him to see if we had landed, and try to frighten us off if we had."

"He must think we're a lot of easy marks," said Jim, as he pulled the last of the supper off the stove and sounded the call to eat. "But who owns this island, anyhow? Does anyone know?"

No one replied for a minute, as they were too busy disposing of fried ham and potatoes, huge slices of bread and butter, coffee, and sundry other things. Supper was served under difficulties that night for they had no table but their laps or the ground; but they made light of their troubles,

and the food disappeared at an alarming rate before the assaults of four healthy appetites.

"I understood that Whale Island belonged to the Blue Hill Granite Company," said Val, presently. "They have a quarry at Cheney Landing, the village at the north end of the island. The company is a big concern with quarries all over creation — a sort of granite trust, you might say — and I don't know where their head offices are; New York, like as not; but they must have a superintendent here, and if they own the island, he can probably be prevailed on to give us a camping permit. The thing for us to do is to go up there bright and early and find out the rights of this thing, get a permit if we can, and then when this Sanders, or anybody else, comes around and tries to scare us off we can give him a dose of his own medicine."

And the matter was left in that way.

By the time supper was eaten and the dishes washed the sun was down, and although it was the middle of July, and July is a warm month, out there on the island fully ten miles from the nearest mainland, it was cold enough for a fire. A cool wind breathed in from the sea, and it was not long before a cheerful blaze was snapping in the stone fireplace, and the boys were grouped in front of it, comfortably lounging in the chairs.

Half of the charm of camp life is the roaring fire at night, with its column of darting sparks,

the flickering shadows, and the glowing blaze dispelling the chill of the night air. As they sat there the moon looked coldly down through the pines, while the sound of the ocean's surges breaking against the island's rocky barriers came plainly to their ears. But by the fireside there was naught but warmth and good cheer. It was the same moon and a portion of the same ocean on which they had gazed the night before, but every moment since that time had been so eventful that the pleasant hours spent at the Mannings' seemed ages ago.

"When we go up to the Landing in the morning we'll get some empty boxes and knock together some camp furniture," said Val, after they had finished discussing Sanders' remarks about the "Screamer," and Sumner had recalled to mind the curious behavior of the two men on the yacht "Penelope."

"Yes, that's so; and get a clam hoe," urged Sumner. "I'll bet there's a lot of clams up at the head of this cove. I saw a good many little holes in the sand when I went after that last pail of water, anyhow."

"Say, Sum, do you know that clams always open their shells when it's high tide?" Carroll asked.

"Of course they do; that's when they get their feed — when the tide comes in."

"No, I mean when they are dug up in a pail.

When it's high tide they'll open their mouths — I mean their shells — whether they're near the water or not."

"Oh, go hire a hall," said Sumner, ungraciously, rising and walking down toward the cove. He seemed to be suspicious of this yarn. "As for you, Cal Morse," he flung back over his shoulder as he disappeared, "you open your mouth whether the tide is high or low."

Sumner came back to the firelit circle in a few minutes, and his good humor was completely restored. He brought the mandolins and the banjo — the latter being his property, and the two former belonging to Val and Carroll respectively. As for Jim, his musical instrument consisted of a very good voice.

"The next number on our program is a banjo solo by Mr. Sumner Parker," Cal announced as Sumner came up the slope. Val and Jim began to clap uproariously, but Sumner was primed for the occasion. After tuning his instrument he sang the following to an air that was pretty much his own improvising.

"The name of this song," he remarked, "is: 'When Jimmy Chased the Monkey on the Roof.' " And he plunged into his theme.

"It was on a summer's day, and the steamer 'Mermaid' lay
At her dock 'way down in Harpsboro, on the shore of Stroud-
port Bay.

On her deck an organ-grinder ground his tunes out with a dash,
While a mighty lively monkey skipped around and took the cash.

CHORUS

“ Oh, when Jimmy chased the monkey on the roof,
Said the monkey: ‘ This is where I keep aloof.’
So he climbed up gay and happy,
Feeling fine but pretty scrappy;
When Jimmy chased the monkey on the roof.

“ Now the monkey wasn’t satisfied, he hankered to be wealthy,
So he grabbed a lady’s pocket-book, but found it wasn’t healthy.
The lady screamed, the dago howled, the monkey skipped out clean,
But Jimmy heard the rumpus and came hot-foot on the scene.

“ Oh, Jimmy is a dreamer and his dreams are tinged with red,
And there’s always something doing after Jimmy goes to bed;
For the valiant deeds that he performs when he is sound asleep
Are enough to raise your hair on end and put your nerves acreep.

“ But Jimmy is a dandy, and there’s nothing, you may guess,
That appeals to valiant Jimmy like beauty in distress.
Cried he: ‘ I’ve dreamed this thing three times and now it’s coming true,’
So he buckled on his climbers and up the wharf he flew.

“ Way up high on the hotel roof the monkey sat at ease;
He opened up the pocket-book — flung contents to the breeze.

The money flew — the purse went too — but a locket and a chain
Slid down the roof, caught on a nail, and stuck with might and main.

“ Said Jim, ‘ I am a climber and I’ve got my climbers, too !
Just let me at that monkey and you’ll see a thing or two.’

He clambered down, got locket and chain, but a shingle
gave away,
And he slid pell-mell down a splintery roof right into a load of
hay !

“ Oh, when Jimmy chased the monkey on the roof,
That the shingles were quite splintery he had proof.
Did he fall down? I should say !
But he lit smack on the hay ;
When Jimmy chased the monkey on the roof.

“ Now the locket had a diamond, but when Jimmy hit the
hay
That brilliant gem had vanished in some dark, mysterious way.
The woman vowed he had it ; but Jim spoke soft and low :
‘ You’re such a perfect lady I suppose it must be so.’

“ When Jimmy chased the monkey on the roof
That the lady was a corker he had proof.
‘ I’m quite satisfied,’ said he,
‘ Just climb up yourself and see ;
But I’m done chasing monkeys on the roof.’ ”

The instant Sumner finished a perfect roar of
laughter went up. Jim, especially, howled and
stamped his appreciation ; while Sumner grinned
modestly, and felt well paid for his strenuous
intellectual efforts.

"I thought that all out coming down on the 'Screamer' to-day," he asserted. "I'm kind of shy on choruses, though, for it's hard to find good words to rhyme with 'roof.' "

"Never mind, old man; you're long on general ideas," consoled Cal.

"Anyhow, I guess that will hold *me* for awhile," Jim remarked, when he had recovered his breath.

"Is this a camp of wild Injuns, or what?" asked a voice from the outer darkness.

The boys turned in surprise to see Captain Field approaching from the direction of the cove. He wore a bandage around his head, but stepped vigorously into the firelit circle, and seemed otherwise to have fully recovered from his mishap.

"Take a chair, Captain," said Val, rising and relinquishing his seat for a pile of cushions. "This is an unexpected pleasure."

"Thanks; don't care if I do," was the reply; and seating himself, Field began filling his pipe, while the boys waited curiously to hear the object of his visit.

"Mighty cheerful, ain't they? — open fires, I mean?" he presently remarked when the pipe was drawing to his satisfaction. The boys assented and Sumner piled on more wood.

"Hain't seen nothin' more of that cuss that threw the rock, have ye? No? Well, I cal'late that's a mighty curious affair." And the Captain puffed for a moment in silence.

"Well," said he, finally, "I kind of thought you'd camp here, and soon's the cobwebs cleared out of my head from that tunk I got it occurred to me 'twouldn't be more than a neighborly kindness to call 'round and tell you a few facts — for puttin' two and two together of course I figgered out *why* you'd come."

"Speak right out if it's about the cipher, for we all know about it," said Val, reassuringly.

"That's what I thought, and I s'pose you solved it, same's I did."

"We found out something about it," Carroll admitted.

"No beatin' 'round the bush, now," cried the Captain. "Yes or no; ain't you found out what them papers mean?"

"Since you pin us down so closely," was Val's retort, "I'd rather not say whether we have or not."

"Oh, shucks!" was the impatient exclamation. "Of course you have, or you wouldn't be camping here. But it won't do you a mite of good."

"Won't do us any good?" repeated Jim. "Why not?"

"Because *I* got the treasure," was the surprising declaration.

"You've — got — the — treasure?" asked Val, slowly and incredulously.

"You bet!" The Captain straightened up

in his chair, took a vigorous puff on his pipe, removed it and spat straight into the fire. Then he looked around on the group with a triumphant grin.

"I told you I had a hunch someone would get ahead of us," muttered Jim to Sumner.

"Oh, dry up; you make me weary with your 'hunches,'" replied Sumner.

"Kind of surprised, ain't you?" remarked Field, at length.

"Yes, but I hardly see how it can be so," said Val. "You had only half of the cipher to work with."

"That was a drawback, I'll allow," agreed the Captain, "but then, you see *I* had the island to go by. Now I'll tell you how I done it. In the first place, I figgered out what that cipher meant. It was something like this: 'Go three hundred and twenty from on shore of island and box beneath.' Wasn't that it?"

"Thanks to what you said about pricemarks, Captain, we made it that way too, but that's a pretty slim clue to any treasure."

"I've got Sherlock Holmes done to a frazzle, anyhow," grinned Field. "Now there was the triangle. I knew that one of the ciphers come from Tower Island and the other from Stone Horse Island, so, reasons I, the treasure is on the third island, and that's Whale. Then, — and this is where havin' the island to work with

come in handy, — I knew there was an old landmark on the shore — ”

“ Whereabouts? ” demanded Sumner.

“ I ain’t a-tellin’,” said Field, calmly, “ but I took that for my startin’ point.”

“ But how’d you tell which direction to go? ” interpolated Jim, leaning eagerly forward in his chair.

“ Well, now, it’s funny, ain’t it? ” was the laughing rejoinder, “ but reely there’s only one way you can go from that landmark, exceptin’ right out to sea; so it wan’t no trouble to know which direction to take, and we took it. We was some puzzled about the three hundred and twenty, whether it was feet or what. But, thinks I, we can run it out in feet, and if we don’t strike nothin’ we’ll try some other measure. So we done it that way, and we found the box.

“ You boys ain’t in it for a minute,” he declared. “ There’s nothing left for you at all, and the best thing you can do is to turn right ’round and hike for Stroudport.”

“ Tell us what was in the box, if you don’t mind.” The request came from Carroll.

“ Doubloons,” replied the Captain, laconically. “ Doubloons — pieces-of-eight — ingots! ”

“ Lordy! ” groaned Sumner, “ and we missed all that? ”

“ What does a doubloon look like, Captain? ” Val asked. “ How much is it worth, anyhow? ”

"Yes, and what is a piece-of-eight?" broke in Carroll.

A sly twinkle appeared in the Captain's eyes.

"Well," he returned, "to tell the truth I was speakin' somewhat figuratively when I used them words. There was a small ironbound box and in it we found about thirty pounds of gold coins, all with what looked like Spanish words on 'em, and the dates was 'way back — old fellows. Besides that, there was some fifty pounds of silver coins — I guess them must have been the pieces-of-eight I was talkin' about," he added. "And there was seventeen of the prettiest little diamonds you ever laid your eyes on — and that was all."

"What do you figure the whole thing's worth?" asked Val. "The gold and silver would amount to about \$5,300 — that is, the weights you mentioned."

"That's what Pike cal'lated. We sent the whole thing up to Boston. The 'Dorabelle's' laid up for temporary repairs to her boiler tubes, but if we can get fixed in time we're goin' up tomorrow night with a cargo of po'gy oil and expect to get returns. I sh'd say the diamonds and all would clean up close to ten thousand. Pike says he's goin' to Europe when he gits his share," he laughed, "but I'm goin' to pay up my mortgages and stay to home."

"Haven't you got any of the coins with you

so's we can look at 'em?" asked Sumner, anxiously. "I never saw a doubloon in my life."

"I'm mighty sorry," was the regretful reply, "but we sent every last one of 'em off to Boston."

"Who's the foreman at your po'gy factory?" asked Val suddenly.

"Why, Bill Sand—" began Field. Then he stopped as if he had been hit. "Why, what —?"

"I thought so," was the short rejoinder. "Don't you think it was rather unneighborly to send him over to order us off the island before we had hardly landed?"

"Did Bill Sanders order you off?" asked the Captain. "Well, he's Vinal's agent on this end of the island, and the orders about campers is strict. If he told you to go, you'd better go — he means business when he gets started, and you hain't really got any right to camp here, now, have you?"

The Captain rose from his chair, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and moved toward the cove.

"Good night, boys," he said, "and I hope I've saved you some trouble about huntin' for a treasure that ain't there any longer."

He had hardly disappeared before Val left the fireside and crept stealthily after him, leaving his friends in an animated discussion of the Captain's statements. In about ten minutes the young skipper returned and resumed his seat.

"Well?" inquired Carroll, suggestively. "How

soon are you going to start back to Stroudport? ”

“ I told you someone would get ahead of us,” reminded Jim.

Val laughed heartily.

“ Cheer up, fellows. You can take everything that man said with a big grain of salt. I just followed him down to the water, and what do you think I found out? ”

“ Tell us, quick,” demanded Jim.

“ Pike was waiting for him in a row-boat, and I crept along the shore as they rowed out. I heard Field say: ‘ I took a spoke out of their wheel all right! I give ’em the stiffest steer they ever had in their lives, I’ll bet; and if they ain’t gone by to-morrow forenoon I miss my guess.’

“ ‘ Yes, but what if Heffler comes before they get out of here?’ asked Pike. ‘ We can’t run out to head him off unless Jake gets his tubes fixed.’

“ ‘ He ain’t due before to-morrow afternoon — he can’t possibly get here,’ said the Captain, ‘ and there’s lots of things can be made to happen before then.’ Then they rowed off and I couldn’t hear any more.”

“ Well, I breathe easier,” declared Sumner, “ for perhaps he was lying about the treasure after all.”

“ I guess any bright fellow could have made up the yarn he did, if you think it over. Outside

of the one cipher he has translated he didn't really tell us anything definite — nothing but what any one could guess at," Val said. "We'd better stay here and hunt awhile. There's no sense in going till we're dead sure he told the truth."

"Yes, but who is Heffler? Do you have any idea?" This was propounded by Carroll.

"Heffler?" This was a name that had caused Val to ponder. He had heard it before somewhere, and it was not a common name. Then, in a flash, his mind went back to the time when he lay, recovering from his fall, on the "Dorabelle's" deck. He could almost hear that drawling voice say, "and I cal'late Heffler could land 'em in the cove, and put 'em up at this old place till we had time to finish the job."

A curious conviction gradually took possession of Val's mind as his memory recalled that fragmentary conversation.

"No, I don't know who Heffler is," he said, and he went on and related what he had overheard while on the "Dorabelle," a subject that had not recurred to him since that night.

"Boys," cried Carroll, "last summer we butted into a plot and got ourselves into all kinds of trouble before we got out again. Are we going to have the same kind of luck this year?"

"I can't imagine what we may be getting up against," Val said, thoughtfully, "but it's pos-

sible the story of finding the treasure was made up out of whole cloth just to get us out of the way so he can put through some scheme he doesn't care to make public."

One thing was certain, Captain Field was appearing in a very odd light, and his affairs and conversation furnished plenty of material for discussion till bedtime. As darkness advanced, however, Jim grew more and more nervous, and finally declared he couldn't go to sleep without rigging some kind of an alarm to warn them of approaching prowlers.

"Who knows," he demanded, "but what that same man may heave a rock in on *us*?"

"Then let's stand watch," suggested Sumner, who did not feel sleepy.

"If you're all as tired as I am I know mighty well the watchman would go to sleep as soon as the rest of us. No, sir! I know a scheme worth a dozen watchmen," and Jim proceeded to rig what he called his "automatic picket line."

He brought ashore from his "kit" on the "Screamer" a quantity of stout twine, some insulated wire, a pair of dry batteries, an electric switch, and an electric bell. While Val and Carroll were making everything snug aboard the motor-boat for the night, with Sumner's assistance he put his scheme into operation.

First they ran a line of twine around the camp

outside the encircling pines, enclosing a space perhaps forty feet in diameter, and brought the ends of the cord together. Jim then tacked the switch to a tree, about a foot from the ground, and tied both ends of the twine to the lever in such a way that when the line was pulled it would close the switch. Then he attached the insulated wire to the switch and laid it to the tent, where he connected up the batteries and the electric bell. He now had a snugly-drawn line of cord all around the camp, kept at a uniform height of about a foot from the ground by the tree trunks.

"Of course the scheme isn't perfect," admitted Jim, when the work was completed, "because the first one that hits the string will probably break it; but, even if he does, the pull will close the switch and set the bell ringing, and it's easy enough to tie the line together again.

"Look out there, you fellows! Step high!" he called, as Val and Cal came up from the cove. But the line was indistinguishable in the dark, and the foremost ran against and broke it. The tension on the cord pulled the switch shut, and instantly the bell in the tent began to ring furiously.

"What did I tell you?" said Jim, triumphantly, as he ran to retie the cord. "Isn't that just the stuff, boys?"

"We're finding out what's in the 'kit,' at

any rate," remarked Carroll, sagely, as he examined the burglar alarm.

"Ho, this is nothing to what would have been in it if I had known we'd really come on the 'Screamer,'" retorted the electrician. "I had a whole wireless telegraph outfit that I made myself all ready to tote down here. I was going to use the engine on the motor-boat to run a small dynamo to generate the current, too, and then we could have talked with all the boats anywhere around us that were equipped with wireless."

"Now I understand why you wanted to know about the diameter and revolutions of the fly-wheel," said Sumner, regarding Jim with admiration.

"But I had to leave it behind," said Jim, yawning, "and now I've got a wireless that calls me to bed."

"Your message is addressed to the whole bunch," declared Val; and they headed for the tent.

In ten minutes everyone was asleep, while the moon looked down peacefully on the quiet scene, the wind sighed softly through the branches of the pines, and the deep-sea swell murmured a lullaby on the rocky shore.

An hour or two passed, and in spite of the hardness of the beds all were slumbering soundly, when of a sudden the electric bell began to ring like mad. Everyone awoke with a start.

“ Look out for rocks! ” shouted Jim, scrambling out from under his blanket. The others piled out at the same moment, and immediately there was turmoil inside the tent.

CHAPTER XIV

HIXON BUTTS IN

"WHERE'S the lantern?" growled Carroll, groping hastily about in the dusk. His hand closed on a bare ankle, and called forth loud expostulations from Sumner.

"Ouch! I've got him! No, he's got *me*! Oh, for goodness' sake won't someone stop that bell?"

But Jim, clad in white pajamas, darted out of the tent and ran for the switch. As he crossed the open space before the fireplace he bumped unceremoniously into a man standing there. Without a thought of the consequences he grasped him tightly by the arm.

"Come quick, boys! I've got him!" he shouted. "What are you doing here?" he demanded of the stranger, who, curiously enough, did not offer the slightest resistance, or make any attempt to release himself from Jim's clutches.

The others immediately emerged from the tent, Carroll lighting the lantern as he came, and the quartette, all in pajamas, surrounded the captive.

"Great Scott, boys, but it does seem good to see you," declared the latter, blinking at the light of the lantern Carroll held up to his face. He was a fellow of medium height, dressed in slouchy working clothes, and had a soft hat pulled down over a face which was in need of a shave. His voice trembled with agitation.

"Why, what's the trouble? Who are you, anyhow, and what do you want?" In a breath all these questions were flung at his head.

"One at a time, please," replied the stranger. "I've had a pretty fair sort of a scare, and I'm about all in, but if you'll give me a little time I'll tell you all about it."

Sumner started a blaze in the fireplace, for it was shivery out there in night clothes. Jim in the meantime shut off the electric bell, and they all sat down before the fire and listened with great curiosity to the tale the stranger related.

"I'm Tom Hixon," he began, simply. "I work for the Blue Hill Granite Company — stone-cutter. Yesterday I took a day off to go fishing in my sloop the 'Pollywog,' and when I got back to the landing about four o'clock the steamer from Rockland was just pulling out. There was a queer looking duck standing on the wharf — looked like a professor of some female college, all dried up, and wore glasses — and he had a pile of baggage strewed 'round beside him.

" 'My good man,' he called to me. 'Can I

engage your services to convey me and my belongings down to Camp Ottumwa? ’

“ ‘ I ain’t in the trucking business,’ said I, ‘ but if we can get there in the “ Pollywog,” and you’ve got money enough to pay the freight, I guess it’ll be a go,’ for I had no idea where this Camp Ottumwa might be.

“ So he got on board with his duds, and we sailed down the west shore several miles and put in at a cove there. The camp is near the water, but it was closed up, so I helped the professor land his stuff and get supper — for he had feed enough along to last a month. It was dark by that time, and he invited me to stay all night, and I agreed. Said he, ‘ I regret to say that I am addicted to somnambulistic habits, and if you should wake up and find me walking around in my sleep I would be much obliged if you’d just arouse me.’

“ About an hour ago, as near as I can guess,” continued Mr. Hixon, “ I woke up and found the professor had gone out, so I pulled on my clothes and started after him. It’s pretty rough country over there, but there’s paths if you know where to look for ’em — which I don’t.

“ I soon got into one, though, and was following it through the moonlight, which made things plain, when all of a sudden I heard a sharp crackling in the underbrush.

“ ‘ Professor! ’ I called. ‘ Is that you? Wake up, professor! ’ ”

“ Was it the professor? ” asked Sumner, who was greatly interested in this odd tale.

“ Well, it wasn’t any professor that I ever heard of! ” declared the narrator, with a shudder. “ It most freezes me now to think of it! ”

“ What happened? ” demanded the four in a breath.

“ Somebody burst out of the bushes with a rush, and ran down the path at me like chain lightning,” was the startling declaration. “ His arms were waving like a windmill, and he was hollering fit to kill! ”

“ ‘ Flee, child of woe! Flee, child of woe! ’ that was what he said. Did I run? You bet I did, and I never stopped till I got here. I was tickled to death when I saw your tent, though I am real sorry to wake you up in this way. ”

“ Oh, that’s all right,” Val reassured him. “ And you didn’t find the professor, after all? ”

“ Not a sign, and, to tell the truth, I haven’t got much appetite left for hunting after him,” admitted Hixon. “ If you don’t mind I’ll just doze here till it gets light, and then I guess I’ll have nerve enough to go back to the ‘ Pollywog. ’ I say, what was that bell I heard ringing when I came? ”

“ That’s our burglar alarm,” explained Jim.

"Nobody can come within a certain distance of the camp but the alarm will go off."

"Good idea, with wildmen chasing around," commented Hixon. He asked no further questions; but took the pair of blankets the boys gave him, filled the fireplace with wood, and laid down on the ground in front of it.

Jim repaired the break made by Hixon in the "automatic picket line," and once more the boys turned in. In spite of the excitement caused by Hixon's coming they all went sound asleep in a short time. But they were not destined to finish the night in peace. About four o'clock the bell again began to buzz, and everybody promptly awoke, but as it was nearly sunrise the occurrence was not as startling as the first alarm had been. Jim went out and shut off the switch. Hixon had gone; his blankets were empty. The east was brightening, and birds were chirping and calling to one another back in the woods.

"Our man's gone," reported Jim, as, after repairing the line once more he went back to bed. "He's got his nerve back and cleared out. I'm not going to get up yet — there's another snooze coming to me." And he rolled in for a final nap.

It was six o'clock in the morning. Three bare-foot youths, with their pajama jackets discarded, stood abreast of one another facing a fourth youth clad in similar fashion, on the high bank

of the cove. Brightly shone the sun, and a pleasant breeze soughed through the pines. An energetic oven-bird was making the air vibrate with his shrill crescendo "Teacher-teacher-teacher-teacher-teach!" while in the quiet intervals a catbird conducted a cheerful monologue in a maple tree across the cove.

"Now, Jim, your father wrote that you were pale and nervous from over-study, and needed fresh air and exercise," remarked Val, who was the one standing alone. "Here's where you get exercise, and the rest of us will take it too, to keep you from feeling lonesome.

"Arms extended," he instructed.

Four pairs of arms swung up to a horizontal position; and then came what is termed in a gymnasium a "setting-up drill," consisting of arm and body movements, which continued till every drop of blood in their bodies was stirring merrily, and perspiration was ready to start gently forth.

Then the exercises stopped. Off came the trousers, and one after another came four splashes as the boys dove off the ledge into a deep spot in the cove. Sputtering and blowing like a school of porpoises up they came a moment later, swam ashore, and began a rapid rub-down with big bath towels.

"Lordy, b-but wasn't that water cold?" cried Sum as he scrubbed lustily at the wet places.

"You bet you, but I'm not a bit chilly; I feel fine and dandy. Tell father I'm getting better," laughed Jim.

Then came breakfast, prepared by Carroll and Jim.

"I want to know who stepped on my feet this morning?" demanded Cal as he passed the coffee.

"It was the same duck that grabbed my ankle in the night thinking I was the lantern," Sumner promptly retorted. "You did, yourself."

"Oh, fade away. I mean it," said Carroll, earnestly. "Just before that burglar-buzz went off the second time somebody was moving around in the tent and stepped on my feet. Now I want to know who it was."

"Say, I believe someone was walking around me once," said Jim, after some reflection, "but it was dark and I was so sleepy I thought it was a dream."

Both Sumner and Val denied being the culprits.

"Well, then," said Carroll, as a sudden suspicion flashed upon him, "maybe that Hixon fellow wasn't so simple and guileless as he appeared. He handed out a curious sort of a story, and I think we'd better look our stuff over and see if it's all here."

"I noticed one thing," declared Jim, "but I was so much interested in what he told us that I forgot all about it."

"What did you notice?" asked Sumner.

"He smelt like that man Sanders, the po'gy foreman."

At this announcement breakfast was temporarily abandoned. Everyone hurried to his property. The "Screamer," of course, was at her anchorage, and the tender was where it had been left, high and dry on the beach. Some of the wearing apparel in the tent seemed to have been disturbed, but Sumner was the only one to report a loss.

"The cipher's gone!" he cried excitedly, as he inspected one of his coat pockets. "I had a copy of the Tower Island cipher in that pocket, and it's disappeared!"

"I'll bet Hixon took it," declared Val, "and that he's one of Field's men, too."

"I'll bet you're right," agreed Carroll, while Sumner and Jim regarded him with gloomy eyes; "and now Field has the whole cipher, the same as we have, and it's a race to see who'll get the treasure first."

"Then the yarn he gave us last night was a lie," said Sumner in a tone of huge relief, "for if Field had really found the treasure he wouldn't be stealing our cipher. That's some consolation, anyhow, fellows."

Val and Sumner started early in the "Screamer" for Cheney Landing. As the chart showed deep water close along the shore for nearly the entire distance, they ran in as near as they could, and

all the way up the island one or the other kept the glass levelled at the shore in an attempt to find the cross. For a couple of miles after leaving the cove they saw no signs of human habitation. Then at intervals they passed summer camps, and saw people here and there; but the sharpest scrutiny failed to find a cross.

Somewhat crestfallen at this result, but not discouraged, a little less than an hour after leaving camp they ran alongside the cribwork supporting the outer end of the steamer wharf at the Landing, where they tied up at a flight of steps and went ashore.

They found the place to consist of a number of buildings, some for business, but mostly of a residential character, strung along a street that followed the shore of the little harbor. Up on the hillside behind the settlement tall derricks loomed in the quarry pits. The tap-tap-tap of stone-cutters' hammers sounded from a group of half-open sheds near the water front; and farther along the shore was the company's wharf, where lay a three mast schooner, while a donkey engine puffed vigorously as it hoisted granite blocks into midair to lower them into the hold.

The office of the granite company was a one-story affair, containing two rooms. In the outer room was the book-keeper and time-keeper's desk — for one man filled both positions — and two draftsmen were at work near him. This was only

one of several quarries operated by the Blue Hill Granite Company, its local administration being in charge of Superintendent Cunningham. By good luck, however, the General Manager was present on a trip of inspection. He looked up inquiringly from his consultation with the superintendent as Val and Sumner entered the inner office and confronted him.

"Yes, I'm the manager," he replied to Val's inquiry. "What can I do for you?"

"Will you please tell us who owns the lower end of this island?" Val came to the point at once.

"Charles Vinal of Rockland — the lower end, the upper end, and the middle of it," was the reply. "Why do you ask?"

"We thought the granite company owned it," said Sumner, in a crestfallen voice.

"No, sir; you're mistaken. The company doesn't own a foot of Whale Island; it gets its quarry rights by lease from Mr. Vinal."

"Do you know if Mr. Vinal has an agent on the south end of the island named Sanders?" persisted Val.

"Never heard of him. Did you, Cunningham?"

The superintendent mused thoughtfully.

"The only Sanders I know down there is the foreman at Field's po'gy factory," said he, presently; "and I guess that when Mr. Vinal makes an agent of him we'll all know it."

“Tell us what you are driving at, young man,” said the manager, “and perhaps we can help you out. By the way, who are you, anyway?”

“I am Percival Brandon, and this is Sumner Parker. We are from Stroudport.”

At this announcement the face of the manager expanded in a broad smile. He arose and shook hands with great heartiness.

“Well, I ought to know you even if you don’t know me. I’m the father of Cheney Killen, the youngster that this chap” — and he patted Sumner on the shoulder — “pulled out of the water down at Hope Island last summer. If Cheney has told me the adventures of Val, Cal and Sum once he has done it a dozen times. Well, well, but I’m glad to see you, boys.”

After that it was plain sailing. The boys described the trouble they had had with Sanders.

“We hoped,” concluded Val, “that the man was wrong; and that you would give us permission to camp where we are.”

“So he ordered you off the island, did he?” rejoined Mr. Killen. He seized a pen and began to write rapidly.

“There, boys,” when he had finished. “If Sanders bothers you again show him this; and if that don’t settle him, let *me* know. Charles Vinal owns the whole of Whale Island, but the company holds a long-term lease of it; and I

guess we've got jurisdiction down at your camp as well as up here at the Landing."

Needless to say this statement was very pleasing to the boys, and they felt very well satisfied with themselves as they said good-bye to the manager.

Next they spent a few minutes with the paymaster, from whom they ascertained that the man Hixon really had worked for the granite company, but had been discharged some time previous, and was understood to be working for Captain Field at the po'gy factory.

"That fixes him!" remarked Val, grimly. And they went along to the company's general store.

Half an hour later the "Screamer" was running back to camp. At the store they had replenished certain shortages in their larder, and refilled the ice-chest. Several packing cases were also purchased, as well as some smaller boxes, and these, partly knocked down for greater convenience in transporting, they had taken aboard, as well as a lobster-pot — hired from a fisherman — and a clam-hoe. The fisherman had verified Sumner's suspicions by asserting that "there was pretty middlin' fair clammin' up in the head of that there cove."

The search for the cross was kept up on the way back just as closely as it had been on the way up; for no one could tell where it might be located, and objects that are concealed when one is going in one direction are often in plain view on

the return. However, after all their trouble they saw nothing of it.

They had come within a mile or so of camp, and were skirting a long stretch of rocky bluff when their attention was caught by the sight of a man, hatless and coatless, running madly down the slope toward the water. One hand grasped a garment of some kind, and as he ran he glanced frequently over his shoulder at something behind. This quickly developed into another man coming in pursuit at a much faster gait. By the time the first had reached the edge of the cliff the second was reaching for him.

Uttering a cry of alarm the foremost eluded his pursuer. He leaped in desperation far out over the water, dropped swiftly downward, and disappeared in the sea. An instant later the "Screamer" reached the spot where he had vanished.

Sumner reversed the propeller, and Val, picking up a boathook, awaited the reappearance of the jumper. He came to the top in a few seconds, coughing and sputtering. Val hooked him by the shirt, towed him alongside, and helped him on board. The man on shore, a wild-eyed fellow of rough appearance, when he saw the outcome of the affair turned and hurried back into the woods.

And then the boys discovered that the man they had rescued was no less a person than Hixon,

"Whew!" gasped the watersoaked fellow, when he had spewed out the brine taken in during his immersion, "but that was a close shave for me. I lost my vest with a fifty-dollar gold watch and a hundred dollars in bills, too," he added ruefully.

"Was that what you had in your hand?" inquired Sumner, as he started the "Screamer" on her course again.

"Yes, hang it, and I let it go the minute I hit the water. Don't you see it anywhere 'round?" And Hixon gazed anxiously at the spot where he had jumped in for signs of his missing garment, but to no purpose.

"I'm no swimmer, and that crazy hyena scared me just about out of my wits. He must be the same one that chased me last night.

"Say, you ain't going to run off without giving me a chance to find my vest, are you?" he continued, appealingly, as the boat got under way.

Sumner slowed down.

"Shall we put him ashore?" he asked, turning to Val.

"Heavens, don't land me there again!" protested Hixon. "Can't you head in nearer and let me have a look?"

"We're under no obligations to you, Hixon," snapped Val, with unusual asperity. "I think we'll just take you along to camp, and you can

tell us where that paper is you stole this morning."

Hixon's face showed surprise. He sat back limply, while the motor-boat started full speed for the cove. Conversation was suspended. Sumner attended strictly to steering, while Val busied himself about the engine, and with other matters pertaining to the boat.

As they approached the cove they saw Jim standing on the outermost point of rock, fishing. As they rounded in he gave a mighty tug and landed a flopping cunner.

"Hooray! Caught seven already!" he announced. "Who in creation have you got there?"

"The burglar that stole the cipher," shouted Sumner. "Come on up to camp; we're going to have a trial."

Jim reeled in his line, picked up the fish, and hurried after. When the "Screamer" came to anchor Carroll was on shore to receive them. He had been hunting the cross, also, but without success.

In his wet clothes Hixon was a sorry-looking object, but he offered no objection to going ashore, and went up to camp willingly enough. Presently he began to talk about the vest with the gold watch and hundred dollars that he had lost; it seemed to worry him a great deal, as indeed it might if his story were true.

"Now cut out that vest business for a minute

and tell us what you did with the paper you stole this morning while we were all asleep," said Val, sharply.

"I don't know what you are talking about," was the reply.

"Look here," said Val, "we know you don't work for the granite company, and that you do work for Field, and that he wants that paper. Parker had the paper in his pocket last night and this morning it's gone; and someone was rummaging the tent while you were in camp and we were asleep. Now what can you say to that?"

Hixon looked searchingly at Val. He saw that the young man was very much in earnest, and that trifling longer was useless.

"I'll tell you all about it if you'll do one thing," said he, after a moment's thought.

"What's that?" inquired Carroll.

"Take me up where I jumped off the rocks and help me find my vest. If you'll do that I'll tell what I know; if you won't I sha'n't say a word."

"If you know anything at all about the paper you know you took it," remarked Jim, sagely. "That's all there is to know, anyway, except where it went to."

"Why did you take it?" Val demanded.

"Field made me," admitted Hixon, grudgingly.

"That's just what we thought," exclaimed Sumner. "I guess the lock-up is about the best place for you —"

"But it hasn't done him or anybody else any good yet," Hixon asserted. He had peeled off his shirt, and was wringing it dry as best he could.

"Why not?"

"He hasn't seen it yet."

"Where is it, then?"

"In a pocket of that vest I lost," was the surprising declaration.

The boys began to breathe more easily. If this were true the theft didn't amount to anything after all.

"Oh, well," remarked Jim after a moment's consideration, "I guess it's better off to stay there."

"Now look here," said Hixon, earnestly; "I want that watch and money bad. I don't believe you'll miss the paper if Field doesn't get hold of it," was his shrewd guess, "but I'll give you fifty dollars — half the money — if you'll get the vest back for me."

"Anyone care to accept the offer?" inquired Val, quizzically. Hixon was a slippery customer. Very likely both watch and money might be purely imaginary.

"Sum and I might make a try for it," said Cal, after asking a question or two. "Maybe that vest is somewhere along the shore, and if it is we can see if the cipher is in it, anyway." Carroll did not take much stock in the watch and money story either.

"All right, then, Hixon," said Val. "We'll take a look for your vest. Step down to the cove, will you, and some of us will come in a minute."

When the fellow had walked out of hearing Val and Sumner related the results of their trip to the Landing, and exhibited the paper obtained from Mr. Killen.

"Now when that scamp comes to put us off we'll give him a dose of his own medicine," declared Val, "and as he's likely to appear at almost any time I must be here. Jim and I can hold the fort," he added, "and we'll do a little carpentering while you're gone."

The "Screamer's" freight was put ashore, and she started on the search for the vest, taking Cal, Sum, and Hixon, but leaving the tender at camp.

Then Val and Jim began making the furniture. In the open space beneath the awning they drove into the ground three pairs of stakes at suitable distances, leaving them about two and a half feet high. Across from top to top of each pair they nailed a strip of board. Then across these three supports was fastened a double length of boards, and the dining-table was completed.

A similar table for cooking operations was constructed near by. For a dish-closet they nailed a box to a tree, and placed another inside the tent to hold various kinds of provisions. Still another box served as a stand for the blue-flame

stove. Between two trees a shelf was nailed, and when a water-pail and tin wash-basin were placed on it, the washroom was in commission. A line was strung up to hold towels. The camp was now ready for occupancy.

"And now do you know how to bait that lobster trap?" asked Val.

"Surely I do. I didn't spend a month down at Codville last summer for nothing," Jim declared. "Just let me get some of those cunners I caught and I'll show you a thing or two."

The lobster trap was — as many of you are doubtless aware — about as big as a trunk, and looked like a crate, for it was made of laths fastened to three D-shaped frames, the flat side of the D being at the bottom. Each end of the trap was covered with a coarse twine network which formed a sort of tunnel in toward the middle of the affair, ending in a round hole, or "funny-eye," a few inches in diameter, through which the lobster would enter the trap to eat the bait placed inside. In the top was a door of lathing with leather hinges and a fastening button, while sticking up inside from the bottom was an iron spear with a barbed tip.

Jim took three cunners, cut their throats, and impaled them on the spear.

"There's the bait for Mr. Lobster," he remarked as he closed and fastened the door, "and now we're ready to set the trap."

They put it aboard the tender, and rowed a short distance out of the cove.

"This is a good place," was Jim's announcement, at length, and they put the trap over the side and allowed it to sink to the bottom of the sea, which was here twenty or thirty feet deep. The trap was weighted with stones, so that it sank readily; while attached to it was a stout line long enough to reach to the surface, where it was tied to a wooden float.

"This is rocky bottom here, and that's where they feed, I believe," said Jim, as they headed back to shore. "To-morrow morning we'll go out and pull it up, and here's hoping there'll be a dozen in it."

"How many do they generally catch at a time in one trap?" asked Val, as they entered the cove.

"Padgett down at Codville used to tell about getting traps so full it took two men to lift 'em, but the most I ever *saw* him get was a dozen. It all depends on how often you pull the trap —"

"And how plenty the lobsters are," laughed Val.

"If we find six in the morning we'll be lucky — who's that?" Jim heard a crackling in the bushes at the top of the bank as they landed. They glanced quickly up.

"Gee!" remarked Jim. "Here's Sanders!"

CHAPTER XV

CARROLL MAKES A FIND AND JIM STANDS GUARD

SANDERS' face wore an unpleasant frown. He strode up to Val, who looked at him with a good deal of curiosity, as he had heard so much about him. "Who's the captain of this outfit?" he demanded.

"I am," said Val, trying to speak pleasantly.

"Oh, you are, are you?" retorted the man, with much acidity. "Didn't I warn you fellows to get off this land by this forenoon?"

"I guess so — somebody did," was the cheerful rejoinder. "Won't you come up to the camp and sit down and be comfortable, Mr. Sanders?" inquired Val with apparent solicitude. "It's rather warm to-day, and it must be hot work walking through the woods from the po'gy factory."

"No, sir; I can do my business right here on my feet, and it won't take me but one minute to do it, either," declared Sanders, belligerently, in his excitement disregarding the suggestiveness of Val's remark. "What I want to know is, why

don't you get out? Didn't I tell you plain enough? Have I got to drive the idea in with a mallet? "

The man was plainly working himself up into a rage, evidently thinking that by such procedure he could the more easily intimidate the boys. He came closer to Val and shook a fist in that young man's face.

"Just bear one thing in mind," said Val, seizing the other's wrist in a muscular grip and forcing down the outstretched arm, "and that is: you can keep your fist away from my nose. We aren't a particle afraid of you, and whatever your purpose may be in coming here, you can't gain anything by trying to frighten us. Now lower your voice and talk sense."

A look of pained surprise flashed over Sanders' face when Val gripped his wrist, and he now retreated a step and spoke with more respect.

"Why don't you get off this land, as I told you to? " he asked in a lower tone.

"We don't get off for one very good reason," was Val's reply. "We investigated your statements, and find that while it is true that Charles Vinal owns Whale Island, yet at the same time he has no control over it as it is leased to the Blue Hill Granite Company. Mr. Killen, the general manager of the company, has given us a permit to camp here as long as we wish to, and has asked us to report to him if you make any

more fuss. So if you are still looking for trouble, I will respectfully refer you to Mr. Killen."

But Sanders would not be backed down so easily.

"Let's see that permit," he demanded.

"No, sir! It's none of your business. You're no more an agent of Charles Vinal than I am!"

"Let me tell you," cried the fellow, his voice rising high with the rage that possessed him at the turn affairs were taking, "that permit ain't worth the paper it's written on."

"It's good enough for us, and that's all there is to it," replied Val, firmly. "We'll stay here as long as we please."

"No, it ain't all there is to it, not by a darned sight," retorted Sanders, with a menacing look. "You young fools are altogether too fresh. You think you own the earth, but let me tell you that if you keep on staying where you ain't wanted this place will mighty soon get too hot for you!"

"Who wants us to get out but Field?" asked Val, with pointed emphasis. And as the fellow paused, at a loss for a reply — caught off his guard, — Val quickly followed up his advantage.

"Put this in your pipe and smoke it," said he sharply. "We know who you are and all about you. You are Field's foreman over at the po'gy factory — and Field is trying to force us off the island. You and Pike and Hixon and the others are helping him."

"Go back to your boss and tell him it won't go. We are on to him, and if he wants a fuss he can find it right here. No — you needn't say another word —" as Sanders started on a tirade, "and you can get out of this camp, too, and stay out. We've seen and heard enough of you!"

"Yes, too *darned* much," broke in Jim, who had been a silent auditor of most of the conversation, but at the last had stolen up to the tent, and as quietly returned bringing with him his rifle, a Winchester 32 repeater.

Sanders turned at this unexpected outburst, and when he saw Jim coming with nervous haste toward him, the rifle held in a suggestive position, he backed away apprehensively.

"Oh, I'll go — I'll go," he said. "Don't shoot," and he hit a lively clip for the head of the cove, but as he went his courage returned, and with it some of his wrath.

"I'll go," he announced again with much more assurance, "but when I come back you'll wish you had never seen Whale Island. I'll fix you yet," he loudly declared, shaking a fist vigorously now that Jim showed no inclination to shoot. "By the jumping jingoes, you fellows will be a sick looking lot when I get through with you!"

And with this dire threat he disappeared, but neither Val nor Jim seemed to be worried.

"Exit Mr. Sanders," said Val as he flung himself into a chair, while Jim grinned and sat down too.

"Gee, whiz!" he exclaimed, "it's exciting enough 'round here, but we aren't any nearer the treasure than when we landed."

At that instant the "Screamer's" chime sounded, and through the trees they saw her swing into the cove. Val and Jim reached the water's edge just as Carroll began calling for the tender.

"Did you get the vest?" asked Jim as he rowed out.

"Where'd you drop Hixon?" added Val, noticing that the man was not on board.

"Oh, we just put him ashore and told him never to show his homely face 'round here again," said Sumner.

"Good riddance," said Val, "but did you get —"

"Yes, did you find the vest?" interrupted Jim, eagerly.

"And did you get the fifty?" from Val. "We want to see the color of that money."

"Fifty grandmothers," exclaimed Carroll, impatiently, as having locked the "Screamer's" companion and made snug he swung into the tender. "We didn't get the vest, but we did find something worth a thousand of it!"

And now it was patent to Val and Jim that both Carroll and Sumner were fairly bursting with excitement over something. They refused to say another word till camp was reached, and then,

after looking about in all directions with an exaggerated air of caution, Carroll said:

“Hullo; I see you’ve furnished the camp.”

“Bother the furniture,” cried Jim, with impatience. “What did you find? Out with it, quick!”

“We found the cross!”

After the sensation produced by this announcement had somewhat subsided Carroll and Sumner told the story of the search for Hixon’s vest.

“We ran up to where he jumped off into the water,” began Carroll. “You remember the shore is bold there, so we could run in close. I got into my bathing trunks, for I expected to have to do some diving. Then we shut off the engine and let her drift with the tide.”

“’Twas just like looking for a needle in a haystack,” Sumner asserted.

“Only worse,” Carroll corroborated. “Of course we didn’t look for the vest on top of the water, loaded down with a fifty-dollar gold watch and a wallet with a hundred dollars in it — fact is, I don’t know exactly how or where we did expect to find it; but Hixon seemed to think it might have stranded in some shallow place, so we drifted and kept our eyes peeled.”

“We were all hanging over the side, and Cal and I each had a boat-hook,” Sumner explained.

“Presently we came to a curve in the shore that looked to be a likely place for the tide to wash up

that missing garment; and, sure enough, the water grew shallower till I could *almost* see the bottom," went on Carroll. "It's protected there by those small islands off-shore, so there was hardly any swell, and we got right in close, almost within touching distance of the high rocks."

"And Cal got so interested in what he thought he was going to see on the bottom —" broke in Sumner.

"I almost saw the fifty dollars," Carroll laughed.

"—that he leaned over too far and fell in head-first, and went down like a stone," finished Sumner.

"Just about six feet down, I guess," said Carroll. "The rocks must be awash there at low tide; and I put out my hands to keep from hitting bottom, not knowing just how deep it was. I grabbed something metallic. Of course I was thinking of the vest, and for an instant thought I had struck a piece of a wreck. Then it flashed over me that this might be the cross, that it might have been set on the edge of the cliff; that the cliff might have cracked and the piece holding the cross split off and fallen into the water — frost will do such things, you know — so I just held my breath as long as I could and felt that thing over. And boys," he declared with strong emphasis, "you can shoot me if it isn't a cross, lying there in a horizontal position on the bottom."

"How big?" asked Val, his eyes wide open with interest.

"I couldn't tell how high it might stand, but the arm was about two feet long. I gave it a tug and it wouldn't move, so I'm sure it is bedded in a piece of rock — a piece that fell with it, just as I explained."

"When he came up he had forgotten all about the vest," laughed Sumner, "and he stayed down so long I began to get anxious for fear he had struck his head and hurt himself. I had made up my mind to peel off and go in after him when up he came and we pulled him aboard. And he was as mum as a clam."

"Of course I was, with Hixon there," explained Carroll. "Then I told him I guessed his vest was a goner and it wasn't any use to look for it any more. He got hot and insisted that we ought to keep right on hunting; but I couldn't see it — I was in a hurry to get a grapple on that cross and find out more about it — so I pretended to get mad, and we ran the 'Screamer' close to a low place on shore and told him to get, and he got!"

"Do you think the cipher he stole was in the vest, after all?" asked Val.

"I don't know," admitted Carroll, frankly. "But let me tell you; while we were getting the 'Screamer's' head around that scamp danced up and down on the rocks and shook his fist at us and said all sorts of fool things. He vowed that the

cipher wasn't in the vest at all — that Field had it, and was going to get ahead of us, and that they would mighty soon make this island too hot to hold us and we'd be sorry we ever camped here — ”

“ Say, Jim, didn't our friend Sanders say something like that, too? ” remarked Val, breaking in.

“ Very much the same language; there really must be something in it, I'm afraid,” replied Jim, soberly. And then he told Sumner and Carroll about the visit of Sanders.

“ I tell you, boys, it's come to the point where we can't go off and leave the camp alone,” Val declared. “ Field has evidently determined to drive us away in one way or another.”

“ Why not move everything back on the ‘ Screamer ’ and live on her instead of on shore? ” asked Sumner.

“ Even then one of us would have to stay by her so long as she was anchored where they could get to her,” objected Carroll. “ If we've got to stand guard, let's have the camp and the room and fresh air and be comfortable. A cruiser's all right when you're cruising and can't expect anything bigger; but you know very well it's not like a five-hundred room hotel.”

“ Then let's stick to the camp, draw lots to see who'll stand guard first, and then take turns afterwards,” was Jim's suggestion. “ Those men have surely got it in for us; but we'll stay here in spite

of 'em till we're positive whether there's any treasure on the island or not."

This met the approval of the others; and having thus laid down their future course of action they proceeded to get dinner and eat it.

"If you need help, fire three shots and we'll come," called Val, as the "Screamer" began to move leisurely out of the cove, carrying Val, Cal, and Sumner to the treasure hunt.

Jim stood on the bank, and, though he nodded and smiled, was keenly disappointed, for the lot had fallen to him to stay behind and guard the camp. Though he was so eager to join in the hunt for the cross that he could almost have cried, yet he stood manfully by his own proposition, and waved his hand to the others as they glided away, carrying the paraphernalia of the search, and the row-boat trailing astern to be used in near-shore work. They rounded the northern point and disappeared, and Jim went up to camp, somewhat nervous, and apprehensive of coming disaster. Everything, however, was quiet and peaceful. There was no hint of trouble in the bright sunlight, the dancing shadows of the foliage, the dull wash of the swell alongshore. A locust was shrilling somewhere near at hand, but the birds that had been so lively in the morning made no sound.

Jim, however, did not propose to be caught

napping. He got his rifle out from the tent, made sure that the magazine was filled, and placed the weapon in a convenient place of semi-concealment. Then he remembered that Val had a revolver, and found it after rummaging a little. Every chamber seemed to be loaded, so Jim shoved the weapon into a hip pocket, where it bulged prominently.

Jim was naturally of a most peaceable disposition; but he determined that if anyone appeared and tried to make a fuss he would do his best to frighten them off by a display of arms. In fact, Sanders had been so easily overawed that it seemed certain such a course would be successful.

For a time he busied himself putting a few finishing touches on the rough furniture that had been made earlier in the day. Then he took the hatchet and went for firewood; but before leaving the immediate vicinity of the camp he put the burglar alarm in commission again — for in the morning the cord had been taken up. He now replaced the line around the camp, and set the switch.

A sudden darkening of the sky at this time called his attention to the fact that the sun had become obscured, and, seeking the cause, he saw filmy streamers of fog hurrying in from the sea high overhead.

There was a fallen pine down toward the shore, and he had not chopped at its branches more than

five minutes before a thick bank of vapor drove in and enveloped everything. Jim, however, had seen sea-fogs before, and there being no sound of trouble from the camp he worked steadily on. He had carried one armful of sticks to the fireplace and returned for a second load when his ear caught the sound of voices off shore. The wind was blowing gently from the southeast, and this, coupled with the dampness, carried the sounds with great distinctness. He strained his ears to catch the fragments of conversation. "Someone's sailing by," he muttered.

"Where are we?" he heard a loud voice ask, and under the conditions Jim knew the sound might come from a distance of a quarter of a mile, to say the least.

There was a reply in an unintelligible grumble.

"Ashore?" queried the loud voice. "Ashore? What have you run us ashore for? Where's Whale Island?"

Again the indistinct grumble.

"You don't know? Somewhere around here? Why aren't you sure? You certainly are a peach of a navigator! Confound this fog, I say!"

The loud tones were very distinct, but of the other part of the conversation Jim could not catch one word.

"Drop your hook, then," decided the loud voice, at length, "and we'll wait till she lifts and we know where we're at."

Next followed some orders, a hurrying of feet along the decks, a rattle of chain through the hawse-pipe and a splash as the anchor went down. Then the sails came down on the run, and afterward was stillness. Whatever the stranded craft was, like a blanket the fog concealed it, along with all that part of Penobscot Bay. Jim turned and filled his arms again from the woodpile, and as he started for camp the electric bell began to ring.

"Good gosh!" he exclaimed, hastening his steps. "I'll bet I'm up against it now, for fair!"

Almost instantly he broke into a run; but had not covered half the distance when he heard a series of loud crashing blows ahead.

"Crash! Crash! Smash!"

"Heavens, what can that be?" thought Jim. He still held to the armful of wood, for after bringing it thus far he didn't propose to abandon it. The bell continued ringing, and now another series of smashes sounded on the air.

But now Jim had reached the outskirts of camp, and there in the centre of the place through the fog he saw the form of a large man vigorously swinging an axe. The dining table was a shattered ruin — that had suffered first. The cooking table had gone with the second lot of smashes.

Smash! Again the axe swung, and down came the dish closet. Tin plates, cups, knives, forks and spoons flew in all directions.

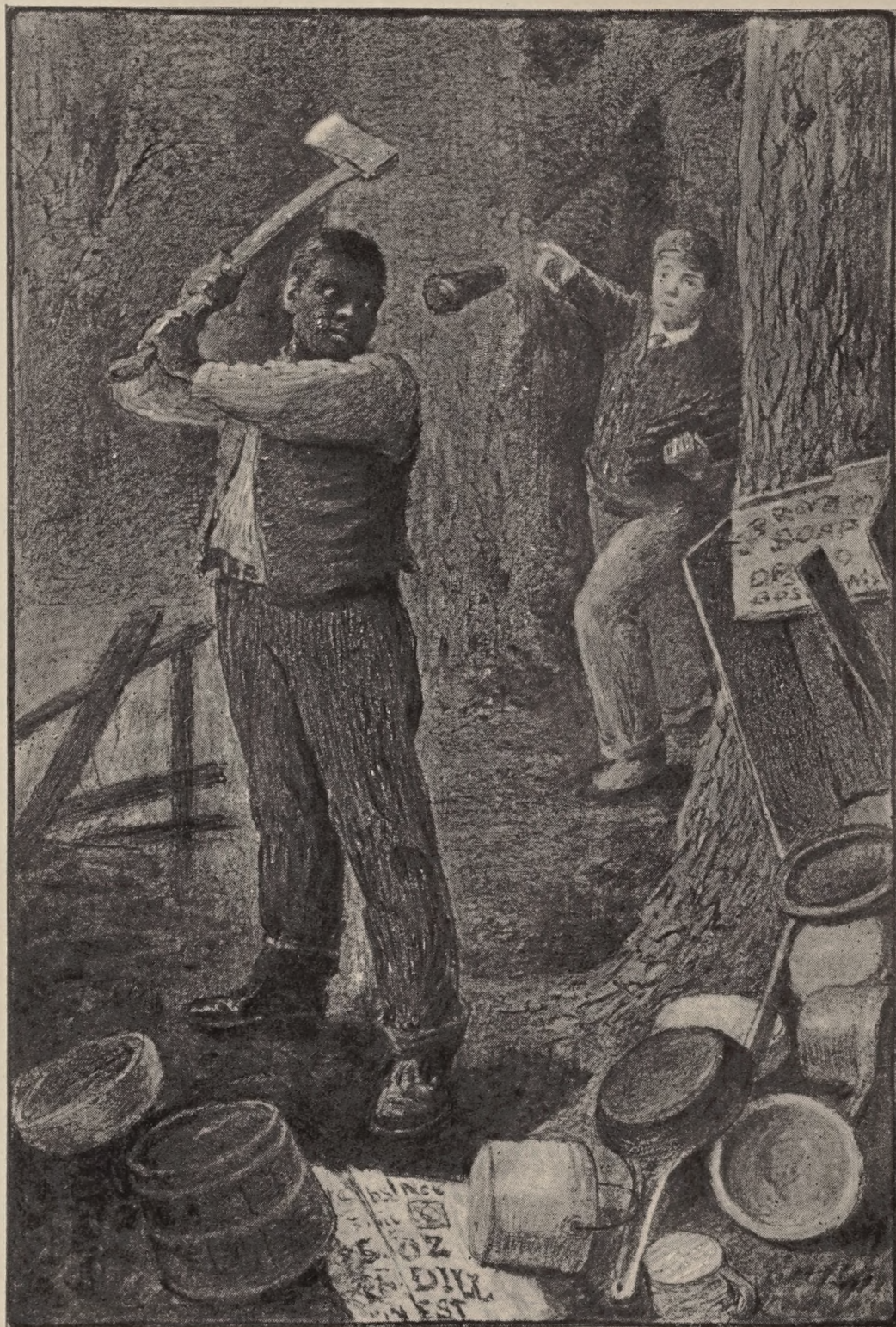
Then the man seized one of the chairs and flung it down the slope toward the cove. He picked up another and sent it hurtling after the first; and by that time Jim Hilton reached the scene of trouble.

Jim had never learned to swear, and he didn't propose to begin now; but he would have given a dollar for words to express the emotions that assailed him when he beheld the rapidly spreading desolation in camp!

"You — you d-devil!" he stuttered in his excitement, "quit that!" And without a moment's hesitation he began hurling his sticks of wood in rapid succession at the marauder, who, bent on the work of destruction, had not heard his approach, and now looked up in surprise. It was a large negro.

The first stick of wood hit the back of his head; the second neatly swiped an ear. Then as the negro turned to face Jim the third stick landed smash on his nose. Jim's certainty of aim seemed to increase with his excitement. The fourth stick also hit the negro's nose, and the fifth landed there likewise and made that member bleed profusely, while its owner became reckless with rage.

He picked up the axe he had just dropped and with all his might launched it at Jim, who, shouting in his excitement, was still throwing sticks of wood with excellent effect. But when Jim saw that axe coming his way he realized that the black man was in a murderous passion. For an



"HE BEGAN THROWING STICKS OF WOOD AT THE MARAUDER."

instant his heart came into his throat. Then he deftly dodged, and the axe, missing him, struck the boulder at the back of the fireplace with vicious force, glanced, and flew out of sight among the trees.

When he exhausted his supply of wood Jim began throwing the stones of the fireplace. He dodged successively the two other chairs that the negro threw at him, meantime maintaining a rapid shower of stones that took effect on various parts of the intruder's anatomy.

All this time the negro was cursing and swearing. Probably at first he had no feeling against the campers. Sanders had sent him to break up the camp, and, being of a lawless disposition, he did not hesitate to carry out his orders as a matter of business. He had found the camp deserted, and though the ringing of the electric bell had mystified him, it had not disconcerted nor deterred him from carrying out his errand.

But now he found a personal enemy to reckon with. The axe and chairs had failed to accomplish his purpose. Smarting from the blows of the wood and stones, and with blood trickling from his nose, in a frenzy of passion he drew a razor from the bosom of his shirt, opened it, and with a cry of rage rushed at Jim.

And then Jim remembered the revolver. He didn't want to kill anyone, neither did he propose to have that negro put him out of business, and

the instinct of self-preservation stirred strongly within him.

“ I must stop him — stop him — ” he muttered, involuntarily stepping back as the other ran forward, “ or in about one second more I’ll be a goner! ”

He pulled the revolver from his pocket, levelled it at the negro, and fired three shots in quick succession.

It was over in a moment. Uttering a cry of astonishment and sudden fear, the negro dropped the razor, turned to run the other way, fell headlong, and lay grovelling amid the ruins of the dining-table.

CHAPTER XVI

RUNNING THE LINE

THE climax of the battle had come with startling suddenness. For a moment after the negro turned and fell, Jim stood with smoking revolver gazing blankly down at the prostrate form. Then he realized the electric bell was madly buzzing — had been doing so, in fact, all through the affray. Mechanically he stepped over and stopped it by opening the switch. His foot kicked an object half-hidden among the pine needles. With a shudder he recognized the open razor. He picked it up, closed it, and with a feeling of horror clutching at his heart threw it into the middle of the cove.

All this took but the fraction of a minute. As he turned again to the grovelling negro there was a rustling among the bushes outside the camp, and then Sanders came up through the fog.

“He’s got more nerve than I gave him credit for,” thought Jim, when he had made sure that it was the foreman of the po’gy factory who was

approaching. "Perhaps, though, he thinks it's the nigger that's doing the shooting.

"Come here, you," he called roughly, for the excitement of the conflict still controlled him. "You're a cheap skate," he went on, in scathing tones, as Sanders hesitatingly advanced, "to send a big bull-dozer down here to do work you were scared to try to do yourself. Come here, or I'll fill your dirty hide so full of holes you'll look like a porous plaster."

As he uttered these bloodthirsty words he levelled the revolver at Sanders, who obediently came up to where the negro was still lying. The latter was groaning and uttering exclamations of abject fear, while his hands clawed convulsively at the dirt and pine needles.

"For heaven's sake," ejaculated the foreman, paling, "what does this mean?"

"It means that the bully and blackguard you sent to smash up this camp has got what's coming to him. Now it's up to you to take him back where he came from. Pick him up and carry him off, do you hear? You pick him up, and do it lively! There's three shots left in this revolver, and after that there's a rifle with sixteen in it!"

At heart Sanders was as big a coward as the negro. Awed by Jim's manner, and the revolver which was aimed straight at him, he knelt beside the fallen man.

"Can't you get up, Jack?" he inquired, giving

him a shake. "Come! See if you can't help yourself a little."

After some coaxing the negro found that he could stand; then half-dragged, half-supported, by Sanders, staggered off. As they were about to disappear among the bushes, the foreman turned and flung back a threat of wholesale destruction.

"All right," returned Jim. "If you've got any more at home like that, let 'em come on. We can handle every one of 'em!"

No one molested him further, but when, after awhile, his companions returned in answer to the three shots, they found him slumped down in a chair, immersed in gloomy thought.

It was a merry party that sailed out of the cove to search for the treasure. As Jim had remarked to Val, they had found plenty of excitement ever since reaching Whale Island, but seemed to be no nearer their object than when they landed. Now, however, it really began to look as if they were on the right track — as if the cross was discovered. Running the line and finding the tilting rock — with whatever was beneath it — were now merely minor details to be quickly dispatched.

It did not take the "Screamer" long to traverse the distance to the scene of Carroll's discovery. The waters of the Bay were bright blue; of the fog that later enveloped everything there was no sign save a slight mistiness far out

to sea. The eastern side of the island faced the main channel into west Penobscot Bay, and several vessels were in sight a mile or two offshore. A four-mast schooner was running free upchannel, and a tug with a string of empty barges that sat high on the water was slowly growing small in the distance down toward Matinicus. All these things they noted with interest as the motor-boat puffed swiftly along; and as they looked and talked in a desultory manner about various affairs, around the southern end of Whale Island came a steam vessel, rounded to the northward, and passed slowly some distance out.

"There goes the revenue cutter 'Woodbury,'" remarked Sumner, as he caught sight of the white hull.

"Running for Rockland, maybe," responded Val, carelessly. "I say, Sum, what do you think the tilting rock looks like?"

"I think it's a big boulder about as tall as I am," was the positive reply.

"How can you tilt a rock of that sort? It would weigh a couple of tons," Carroll objected.

"I was in the country once where they showed me a big balanced rock out in a pasture," explained Sumner. "It was ten feet high, but it stood balanced on a little flat face there was on it, and by pushing it you could make it jiggle. Now I believe this tilting rock is something like that — not so large, of course. They cut a hole in the

ledge and put the box in it; then they set this tilting rock over the hole, and when we find it we'll just give it a little pry and it will roll off the face it sets on and rest on another. Then if we want to put it back, just pry the other way and it will tip back and cover the hole."

"I see you've got it all planned out," laughed Val. "I guess my idea is something like yours. What do you think, Cal?"

"I don't pretend to know a thing about it," said Cal, conservatively. "When we find it we'll know all about it; and if you will just shut off the engine we'll anchor. This is where I found the cross."

Over went the anchor, and the "Screamer" swung in the tide, now beginning to ebb. Carroll began to disrobe.

"Sure this is the place?" asked Val, as he scanned the face of the rocky shore.

"Certain," Carroll replied. "See that recess in the line of the cliff where it looks as if a piece had split off?"

The place mentioned was in plain sight.

"I figure that is where the cross used to stand, and that the piece of rock it was set in split off and fell into the water."

"Then what's the use of raising the cross?" Val wanted to know. "Keep your clothes on, old man. We'll start from the edge of the rock where it's split off, allow a little for the thickness

of the break, and run our line just as if the cross was standing there. It's going to be a good deal of guess-work and luck, running out the line, anyway," he continued, "and I think we'll be a great deal better off to leave the cross where it is."

"For one thing Field won't know where it is," exclaimed Sumner, "and we won't care whether he's got the whole cipher or not so long as the cross is hidden."

This seemed like a sensible idea, so they decided to adopt it, and to land at once and begin running out the line. Carroll resumed what clothes he had already taken off, and they all went ashore in the rowboat, taking the crowbar, the compass, and the tape line. Besides these things they had a camera tripod of Carroll's, and an affair which he called a sighting-board to use in conjunction with the compass. This board was about six inches wide and eighteen inches long, and could be screwed to the top of the tripod just as one would attach a camera. A straight line ran from end to end of the board along its middle, and at each end of the line a wooden pin like a skewer was fastened in an upright position, each pin having a groove cut across its top in the same direction as the line. To go with this apparatus they had a slender pole some six feet long, pointed at one end so it could be easily driven into the ground.

After securing the tender, the boys took their apparatus to the edge of the cliff where the frag-

ment had broken off. Then Carroll set up the tripod as near the edge as he conveniently could, close to the place where they decided the cross had stood. He fastened the sighting-board in place, and laid the compass upon it so that it occupied the centre. Then he turned the board until the line on it coincided with the marks on the compass card that denoted southwest.

“So far so good,” he remarked, when this had been done, “and now we must decide whether to go southwest by compass, or southwest by actual direction.”

This was a subject that had been discussed several times, but never definitely decided — in fact, it seemed it would have to be determined by actual trial. The problem was this: did the originator of the ciphers run out his line by compass, — magnetic north — or did he run it by true north? True north, the direction of that point we call the north pole, is practically fixed, unvarying in its location; but magnetic north — that mysterious place where the great natural magnet earth marshals the hidden force that attracts the point of the compass, is always moving, and seldom coincides with true north. Coast survey charts provide for this difference between north by compass and true north, and state for the information of the mariner the exact variation between the two at certain dates, and the annual increase or decrease in the variation.

“ This year,” remarked Val, “ I see by the chart that the variation in this part of the Bay is about fourteen degrees west — that is, the compass points fourteen degrees west of true north; and let me tell you something else. Suppose we run out a line three hundred and twenty paces of three feet each, which means nine hundred and sixty feet. If we run out two lines of that length, one true southwest, and the other by compass, the ends of them will be over two hundred and thirty feet apart. So you see what a slim chance there is of hitting the rock the first time, no matter how we run it.”

Sumner, who had struggled with this question till he felt thoroughly at home with it, now interposed.

“ Seems to me,” he said, “ we’d be foolish to run the line by compass. We don’t know how long ago the treasure was buried, so we can’t tell what magnetic north was then. Let’s run it out by true north as near as we can, and see what happens.”

“ Well, for goodness’ sake, let’s run some kind of a line quick,” said Carroll, impatiently, “ or we won’t do it this afternoon. I’m thinking we’ll be lost in the fog pretty soon.”

And sure enough, fog was drifting in overhead, and the sea to the southeast was obscured.

Carroll shifted his sighting board so that the line coincided with marks on the compass card fourteen degrees further north than the compass

southwest — southwest by compass being fourteen degrees farther south than real southwest, and they began operations in earnest. They allowed a few feet for the break caused by the splitting off of the rock, and while Val held one end of the tape line close to the tripod, Sumner, with the other end and carrying the pole, walked ahead in a direction indicated by Carroll till he reached the end of the hundred foot tape. Then Carroll sighted through the grooves in the upright pegs of the board and told Sumner exactly where to plant the sharpened pole. The shore here was sparsely wooded near the water — bayberry bushes and stunted evergreens were interspersed with juniper and other low growths — so when the end of the tape was first reached Sumner was in plain view. Carroll, therefore, did not have to move his tripod; but Val moved along to the pole and took that position while Sumner took the pole and moved forward again as before to the end of the tape, when Carroll again sighted across the pegs and told him where to make his second stand. This brought Sumner into the edge of the larger growth of trees, and Carroll took up the tripod and moved it to the end of the two hundred feet now run out. It was a rough method — only approximately accurate — and they found it impossible now to go more than a hundred feet at a time without moving the tripod and compass forward. There was

not a vestige of a path, and often large trees interfered with the sighting, while tangled underbrush made walking difficult. Frequently it was necessary to move forward in fifty or twenty-five foot lengths on account of the trees, but they kept steadily advancing, and to their surprise and gratification found presently that they were moving upward along the bottom of a shallow gully or ravine, not perceptible from the shore, whose direction was precisely the one they wished to take, and which offered the most easy access inland. A trifling variation would have sent them out of this gully, trailing over a rough and rockstrewn hillside. Elated by what seemed an indication of good judgment on their part in starting as they had, they pressed forward in spite of all obstacles, making every move with all the care possible with their crude apparatus, until they had reached a distance of eight hundred feet from the starting point.

"Right here," said Val, when they had come together on the spot, "is the end of three hundred and twenty paces of two and a half feet each. Does anyone see any sign of a tilting rock?"

They stood in a little open spot. There was plenty of outcropping ledge, but nowhere within sight was there a rock that would fulfil any conception of a tilting rock.

"Then it's onward for us, to nine hundred and sixty feet," announced Val. And they were off

again, but before they had fairly started in swooped the fog and made it impossible to see twenty feet with accuracy. But it would take more than fog to stop them now. Though every time they shortened the length of line measured the chance of error increased, still they persisted. Ten feet at a time, fifteen feet at a time, sometimes twenty feet, on they went. Now they came into a grove of large hardwood trees, and then, to their great surprise, the end of a line of nine hundred and fifty feet from the starting point brought them up against the front door of an old and dilapidated house, which stood there hemmed in by the forest, its paneless windows staring blankly out on the foggy solitude.

Built of wood, the house was between thirty and forty feet square, and a story and a half high. Here and there the weather-worn clapboarding had cracked and broken away, revealing the rough boarding underneath. The long slope of roof showed little except boards, for the hand-made shingles, split long ago from "pumpkin pine," that once made it rain tight, had rotted and fallen off, or been blown away by fierce gales. From the middle of the ridge protruded a chimney, fully six feet square, that spoke loudly of large fireplaces and brick ovens.

"Val Brandon," exclaimed Sumner, "I'll bet my hat this is the old house in the woods that you heard about on the po'gy boat."

He stepped up on the broad stone door-step, and tried the latch of the door, which, weather-beaten like everything else, hung sagging from its hinges as though mere existence was a burden. It yielded and creaked open, and with curiosity written deep on their faces the trio entered the old house.

The interior of the building was more dismal than the outside. The front door opened into a square entry occupying the space in front of the chimney. Out of this to right and left doors opened, one leading into a living-room that ran from front to back of the house. In this was a tremendous fireplace that would easily accommodate double-length cordwood — it was, in fact, a small room of itself. On the other side of the house were two rooms; the one in front probably intended for a bedroom, and the one at the back for a kitchen. The odd thing about this latter room was that while there was not a vestige of furniture in any other, in this a rusty old cook-stove had been set up with funnel pointing into the throat of the fireplace there, and a table stood near, with a pail of water, a bag of flour, some vegetables, a few tin dishes and a knife and fork or two upon it.

“Here’s signs of life, all right,” remarked Jim. “What can this mean? I guess we’d better clear out, for maybe someone’s living here.”

The rooms had once been plastered, but count-

less rains, which the leaky roof had done little to keep out, had softened and caused the plaster to fall till now walls and ceilings were well-stripped, and the floors were littered with the débris.

There were still two doors leading out of the living-room to be explored. One opened into a dark cellarway; the other up-stairs. As Val was about to open this latter door, the boys were astonished to hear footsteps cross the floor over their heads, and begin to descend the stairs. For an instant they stood regarding one another in surprised indecision and wonder, and then a man opened the door and stepped hurriedly into the room — a man clad in a suit of dark blue serge, much wrinkled and torn in places, his hair uncombed, his face stubbly from lack of shaving, his whole aspect one of untidiness and ill-care.

He regarded the three boys for a moment with unconcealed surprise; his eyes gleamed brightly, and shifted constantly in their sockets. One after the other he scrutinized the trio. Then he approached Val, and with an air of acquaintance-ship held out his hand and said,

“How do you do? I am very glad to see you.”

“You certainly have the advantage of me,” said Val, touching the dirt-begrimed hand gingerly, though something about the fellow seemed to stir a chord of recollection. “Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?”

“I used to be the man in the moon,” was the

answer, given very seriously, "but now I am the King of Whale Island."

"It's engineer Marshall of the 'Sea Rover,' boys," exclaimed Val, in amazement. "How do you suppose he got out of Augusta asylum and came back here?"

"Why do you always call me Marshall?" demanded the fellow petulantly. "I tell you I am not Marshall. I am the King of Whale Island."

Val turned to his companions.

"There's not the least doubt about it," he said, in a low tone. "This fellow is Marshall, the crazy engineer of the steam-yacht, who ran us ashore in the cove last summer. Somehow or other he has escaped from the asylum and come back here."

Val stepped close to the insane man, looked him fixedly in the eyes, and said, clearly and incisively:

"Just one year ago you were engineer Marshall of the steam-yacht 'Sea Rover.' Engineer Marshall of the 'Sea Rover,'" he repeated. "Can't you remember?"

The other listened attentively, but shook his head.

"No," he said, simply, "I can't remember."

"Try to recall," urged Val. "Try hard to remember. The 'Sea Rover' was running for Tower Island — she was in a terrible storm — you were the engineer, Marshall — you slipped

and fell on the stoke-hole steps, and hit your head. Look, there is the scar now," and Val pointed to a livid scar near the man's right temple.

"Can't you remember all that?" persisted Val.

The demented man passed a hand over his forehead and a mental struggle wrinkled his brow in a frown, but he finally shook his head once more.

"Don't you remember Major Bangs?" demanded his interrogator, not yet ready to give up, "or Captain Jones — the mate Bruce — Fenderson, the deckhand?"

As Val mentioned the last name a gleam of understanding flashed over the lunatic's face.

"I know Fenderson very well," he replied, quite calmly, "but he calls himself Pike now. He is the mate of the po'gy boat 'Dorabelle.' But these other things you speak about — why do you bother me with things that never happened — things that aren't so?" He flared up with sudden heat, and his eyes flashed. "I am not Marshall. I am the king of this island; but there is a conspiracy on foot to invade my island," he asserted, "and it keeps me on the alert — constantly on the alert, here and there, by day and by night, creeping about and listening — listening. And sometimes I chase the conspirators when they come too near my palace," he waved his hand about the dilapidated room.

"And once," he went on, in a reminiscent tone, "I saw one of the chief conspirators walking below the cliffs, and I threw down a rock at him; and the conspiracy came near being ended then and there; but some men in a launch called to him and saved his life."

"Lordy," whispered Sumner, "so he's the fellow that tried to brain Captain Field! Say, he's plumb nutty, all right, and mighty dangerous!"

"Hush up, you kid," Carroll nudged him sharply. "Listen!"

"What is this conspiracy?" Val asked, curious to know the latest vagary of the unfortunate man.

A crafty gleam lighted Marshall's eyes.

"Yesterday I heard them talking it over," he asserted. "Two weeks ago a fishing schooner left Newfoundland with forty Chinamen on board who were to be smuggled into the United States. Day before yesterday she was to transship them on the high seas to another schooner — a yacht. To-day this yacht is due at Whale Island with the Chinamen. Heffler is the man's name — Heffler is running the yacht and bringing the Chinamen, and he will land them at the cove near your camp, and smuggle them into my island — into this very house," he declared, with a dramatic gesture.

"Who's doing all this?" eagerly questioned

Val, for recalling the conversation he had overheard that night on the "Dorabelle," it began to look as if the ex-engineer was speaking the truth — though to be sure he might have woven with the truth a liberal amount of insane fancy.

"Field and Pike," declared Marshall. "Sanders, Hixon — ha, ha, my brave Hixon who runs from his own shadow — and Heffler. Just five at this end of it; but besides them there are the people in Newfoundland who get the Chinamen together there, and the big Chinese company that puts up money to get the men smuggled in."

"There it is again — Heffler —" said Carroll, reflectively. "Remember what you heard on the 'Dorabelle.' This may be true."

"I swear it's true," said Marshall, emphatically.

"What is the name of the schooner-yacht that will put in here, and what will they do with the Chinese after they land?" demanded Val.

"I cannot tell the name of the yacht — I tried to find out and could not. But listen: to-night the Chinamen will be loaded on the 'Dorabelle' and carried away."

"Where to?"

"I will tell you. As soon as the forty Chinamen are on board they will start for Boston with a cargo of po'gy oil. At the head of the wharf in Boston where they will unload the steamer is

a Chinese laundry, and the Chinamen will steal away from the steamer one or two at a time during the night time and go to the laundry, where they will be taken care of and sent to different parts of the country." Marshall's manner was earnest and solemn. There was now but slight trace of the nervous frenzy that had characterized him at the first.

"But I am still the King of Whale Island," he declared, stoutly, "and I will not have these forty Chinamen smuggled into my island. I call on you to assist me in keeping them out!"

"All right, Mr. King," said Val, gravely, "we'll do the best we can for you. I suppose we can find you here at the palace any time we wish?" he went on.

"Any time you wish," Marshall agreed, leading the way to the front door, and ushering out his guests. "And now the audience is at an end. Good day." He shut the door after them, and left the trio standing on the door-step in a most peculiar state of mind. And as they paused, each waiting for the other to speak, from the direction of camp, borne clearly on the wings of the south-east breeze, and intensified by the dampness of the fog, came the sound of three pistol shots.

"It's the signal!" cried Sumner, "Jim's in trouble!"

With one accord they gathered up their effects and hustled for the "Screamer." Once aboard

they had the anchor up in a jiffy, the engine was started, and back for camp they went as fast as the fog would permit.

Arriving in the cove, they could hardly stop to drop the anchor before they all piled into the boat and went ashore.

"What's the trouble, Jim?" questioned Carroll, anxiously, as he reached the camp slightly out of breath, and found the guard sitting dejectedly amid the ruins.

"For goodness' sake, what has happened to this place?" cried Val, surveying the havoc.

"Good gosh, Jim, it looks as if a cyclone had struck us!" was Sumner's exclamation. "What is the matter? Did Sanders come back?"

"Boys," said Jim, very solemnly, and there were tears in his voice though his eyes were dry, "I believe I have killed a man, and it's terrible to think about."

"Did you have to shoot?" Carroll demanded. "Tell us, old man."

Jim quickly outlined the story of the assault on the camp. "He was a big negro, and he came at me with a razor."

Sumner shuddered audibly.

"I shot at him three times, and he fell in a heap. Then Sanders came and I made him carry him off," added Jim dully. "He could walk, but I'll bet he'll die just the same, and I'll be to blame."

"Did you fire your rifle or my revolver?"

asked Val as he quietly picked up his weapon from the ground where Jim had dropped it after the affray had ended.

“ With the revolver. Oh, it was awful! ”

And then to the astonishment of the others Val opened his mouth in a guffaw of merriment.

“ Cheer up, Jim, old boy! ” he cried, as soon as he could control himself. “ You only scared that negro half to death — you couldn’t possibly have shot him, for this is only loaded with blank cartridges left over from Fourth of July! ”

CHAPTER XVII

A TRIP IN THE FOG

JIM HILTON recovered rapidly from his fit of depression when he found he had been shooting with blank cartridges. The gloom in his face was quickly replaced by a smile of relief. His naturally elastic spirits came up with a bound, and he joined enthusiastically in the work of repairing the damage done by the negro. This, luckily, was confined wholly to the box-board furniture, and as there was still a supply of unused boards on hand it did not take long to patch things up as good as ever. It was fortunate, though, for the safety of the food and clothing and the tent, that Jim had returned to camp when he did. Otherwise a good deal of damage might have been done.

Jim listened with interest to the story of running out the line; but when he heard about Marshall and the smuggling plot his eyes opened in amazement.

"That reminds me, fellows," was his sudden ejaculation. "Some kind of a boat went aground

right off here while you were gone. Now what do you bet she hasn't got the Chinamen? "

It was the others' turn to be interested as Jim related the conversation he had overheard while gathering wood.

"You say this loud voice asked 'Where's Whale Island?'" inquired Val, when he had concluded. Jim nodded.

"That may signify a good deal, and again it may mean nothing at all. But I think we'd better run out there and see who it is," said Val, thoughtfully.

"In this fog?" objected Carroll. "We might get lost and be all night getting back, and never find the vessel either."

"I'm willing to take the chances, with a compass," was the reply. "This day's work has cleared up a good many things," Val continued. "In the first place Cal located the cross, and it's hidden where Field will never find it — except by the merest chance, as we did. So we don't care whether he has the ciphers or not."

"Then again, we've been supposing all along that Field was trying to drive us away because he wanted to find the treasure himself. Well, he probably does want to find it, but if Marshall's story is true Field's chief reason for butting us is because these Chinese are due to reach here to-day, and he doesn't want us around when they come."

"Guess you can see as far through a grindstone

as anybody, old man," agreed Carroll, while Jim and Sumner nodded their heads. "But tell me, where does the profit come from in smuggling Chinese into the United States? They all come in as poor as mice, and generally go to work in laundries. I don't see where the money comes from."

"I can tell you," Jim broke in. "I read about it in the papers that time the revenue officers were watching for the yacht 'Frolic' that smuggled some Chinese into Providence awhile ago. They think there is a rich and powerful company or syndicate with agents all along the boundary between the United States and Canada, and down through Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. This company advances the money to pay for the smuggling, and every Chinese coolie that employs them to get him into the country pays five hundred dollars for the service — that is, the Chinaman agrees to pay this amount, and is kept in practical bondage to the company until he has earned and paid over the cash. That's where the money comes from."

"Forty coolies at five hundred apiece would be twenty thousand dollars for the bunch," Val calculated. "No wonder the company was willing to offer Field two thousand dollars and rations if he would land them in the United States. I wonder what the penalty is for smuggling Chinese. Do you know that, too, Jim?"

"Surely," was the ready reply. "Anyone who helps smuggle Chinese into the United States is liable to a fine of a thousand dollars and imprisonment for a year. The master of a vessel bringing in Chinese is liable to be fined from five hundred to a thousand dollars for *every one* he brings in or tries to bring in, and to be put in prison for from one to five years. And besides that, his vessel may be confiscated by the government."

"That's a stiff dose," exclaimed Carroll, "and if Field is really doing this sort of thing I don't wonder he's anxious to get us out of the way."

"Well, boys," remarked Val at this point, rising and starting toward the cove, "who's going out in the fog with yours truly?"

"Don't we hunt for treasure any more this afternoon?" demanded Sumner.

"What's the use in this fog? We ought to run that line again from the beginning," said Carroll. "We brought up at 950 feet on the door-step of the old house, and ten feet further would have landed us about in the brick oven."

"We can try it again in the morning, or tonight if the fog lifts in time," Val said, "but I'm anxious to know who's ashore out there. Who goes?"

"Not for mine, thank you," declared Carroll. "When that colored gentleman discovers he has

nothing worse than a broken nose he may take a notion to come back for his razor and axe, so if you don't mind I'll stay right here."

"Me too," remarked Sumner, laconically.

"You're a lot of squealers," taunted Val.
"How's *your* nerve, Jim?"

Jim allowed it was in working order, so they two embarked on the "Screamer" and went cautiously out of the cove. When they had cleared the entrance Jim indicated as well as he could the direction from which the talking had been heard. Val took his bearings, and steering by compass they went slowly off through the thick mist, with Val at the wheel and Jim forward at the bow keeping a sharp lookout, while the whistle was blown at frequent intervals.

Val had studied the chart closely before starting, and knew that there were no ledges in that vicinity near enough the surface even at low tide to ground the "Screamer," which drew only thirty inches of water; but about a quarter of a mile offshore in a southeasterly direction from the cove there was a series of shoals that might easily catch a vessel of any draft. The location of these shoals and Jim's idea of the direction from which the conversation had come seemed to agree; so they headed as nearly as possible toward that point.

The tide had been high at quarter to one, and as it was now about four o'clock it was at half ebb, and racing strongly seaward. The engine

was turning at about quarter speed, but the tide fully doubled that, so it was easy to figure out that it would not take the boys long to travel a quarter of a mile. In fact it was not more than a minute after the shore had vanished in the fog before Jim uttered a warning cry. Something dark showed dead ahead.

"Stop her! Stop her!" he cried. "Look out there, ahead!"

Val obeyed the order as quickly as he could. He pulled the clutch over into the reverse motion, but before there was any appreciable diminution of the boat's headway the dark object which Jim had glimpsed resolved itself into a rowboat containing two men. Val gave the steering wheel a quick turn, but before the "Screamer" could do more than begin to swing off there came a grating crunch and sudden shock. There was a loud shout from one of the men in the rowboat, a cracking and splintering of wood, and then the two boats separated as suddenly as they had come together, and faded from each other in the fog.

"What did we smash?" cried Val, as having throttled the engine down to its slowest gait, he threw the propeller out of gear and then ran forward to where Jim was standing in astonished silence, vainly endeavoring to pierce the fog in the direction of the vanished boat.

"We side-swiped 'em for fair, and bu'sted one of their oars, as near as I could tell, and they

scraped some paint off for us," was his answer. "Now who do you suppose they are?"

There was not a sound from the fog to tell that a rowboat was anywhere in the vicinity.

"Halloo!" shouted Val. "Halloo, the boat! Are you damaged?"

There was no response. The fog hid everything, and the men in the rowboat, whoever they were, kept quiet.

"Well, now don't that beat the Dutch?" exclaimed Val, in perplexity. "Didn't you see the men at all, Jim?"

"Just a glimpse, and I couldn't be sure I had ever seen them before, but if you want me to guess, I'd say they were Sanders and Hixon."

"I'll bet that's just who they are," was Val's declaration, as he went back to the wheel. "They've probably been out to that schooner — that is, we'll suppose they have; though I don't see how they knew she was there, or could find her in the fog."

"Whoever it is, they prefer to keep dark," replied Jim. "Are we going on?"

Forward they went again, and an instant later a stronger gust of wind than usual opened a narrow lane through the fog and revealed dead ahead the bows and forerigging of a white schooner-yacht. It was only a moment before they glided close under her bow, whereon Val beheld with considerable surprise the gilt letters "Penelope."

Val had shut off the engine the moment the yacht appeared. As they drifted alongside Jim saw a ladder over the side. He reached successfully with a boathook, and a moment later they made the bowline fast.

Jim decided to stay by the "Screamer" to guard against any contingencies, so Val swung himself over to the ladder and climbed to the yacht's deck. There was no one in sight, though, to be sure, the fog, which was now thinning somewhat, rendered objects at a little distance quite indistinct. Somewhere forward somebody was talking in subdued tones. Val walked aft, and just as he came abreast of the cabin a loud voice inside burst forth. As every window was open Val could scarcely help hearing every word.

"Those Chinks have *got* to stay below, I say. I tell you the risk is too great — we can't have 'em loafing around on deck."

The response came in a voice too low for Val to catch, but what he had heard was quite enough to convince him that a part, at least, of the crazy engineer's story was true, and that the "Penelope" was the smuggling yacht that was due at Whale Island that day.

"Do you think I'm going to set here on this rock with that bunch of Chinese up forward, and a revenue cutter likely to appear any time?" demanded the loud voice. "Not by a long sight! If this blank fog will give us a chance we'll make

Field bring his old po'gy tub 'round here as soon as it's dark and take 'em away. Then we can get a tug to haul us off, for we won't care who comes aboard or sees us after that. Great Scott, what's let loose now? "

And this was the question that Val Brandon was asking himself at the same moment, for as he paused involuntarily to listen to the conversation in the cabin an outburst of cries sounded forward, and two men came running aft towards him. This was disconcerting, to say the least, for Val naturally supposed this demonstration to be directed at himself. Hurrying to the rail, he took possession of a brass belaying pin. Then he retreated to the quarter deck, turned and faced the charge. In an instant the real situation was apparent. A sailor, uttering cries of fear, was running madly toward him, and close behind, giving vent to ejaculations in a strange language, came a Chinaman in pursuit, brandishing a knife. They seemed to traverse the yacht's waist at one leap. Pellmell they came along the narrow passage between the cabin trunk and the rail, the sailor but a few feet in the lead. Scared half to death the man abruptly rounded the corner of the cabin.

At that instant the Chinaman let fly with his knife at the fleeing form ahead. Neither of them appeared to as much as see the skipper of the "Screamer," but Val, though he knew nothing of

the rights or wrongs of the quarrel, acted without hesitation. As the Chinaman threw the knife, Val hurled the belaying pin. The knife missed its intended mark, hit the taffrail with a twang and stuck there quivering; but the belaying pin struck the Chinaman fairly on the side of the head and bowled him over like a nine-pin. And just then two men emerged from the cabin, and gazed in surprise at the scene on deck.

One of them was short and rather stout, a fellow of perhaps thirty-five years, well-dressed, but in clothes of a loud pattern. He was the same man the boys had seen on the "Penelope" in Stroudport harbor when they were trying out the "Screamer." The other person was evidently the schooner's captain, for he wore a yachtman's uniform, suited to such a position.

The sailor had run across the quarter-deck, up the other side of the cabin, and disappeared forward. The loudly-dressed man and the "Penelope's" captain looked silently for a moment at the fallen and half-dazed Chinaman. They made no attempt to touch him. And then they saw Val. A look of positive fright passed over their features, but after a fashion they recovered their self-possession, and, disregarding Val, the fleshy man spoke loudly.

"This has gone too far, Captain Rolfe," he declared, pointing at the fallen man. "Just have someone carry this fellow forward where he

belongs, and tell that sailor he'll lose his job if he doesn't leave the cook alone."

The Captain nodded acquiescence, but, instead of calling a subordinate to do the errand, went forward himself with an alacrity that showed Val he was glad to leave an unpleasant situation.

Having disposed of this matter the fleshy man turned to Val.

"Well, sir," he said, brusquely, "who are you, and what do you want here?"

By this time Val had determined what his cue should be. It would not do to let this man suspect that the smuggling scheme had been discovered.

"I don't want anything," was his smiling rejoinder. "Don't you need help, yourself?"

His quick suspicions being disarmed by Val's apparent unconcern, the man relaxed his brusqueness, leaned back against the cabin, and passed a somewhat tremulous hand across his forehead.

"No, thank you; I think we're all right. Anyway, we'll get off here on the next high tide," he added, after looking Val keenly in the face.

"Are you leaking any?"

"Not a drop."

"We're camping on Whale Island and ran out to see if we could help," explained Val. "I came aboard just in time to see your Chinese cook mixing it up with the sailor — in fact, I tried to help things out with the belaying pin."

This matter-of-fact reference to the Chinaman as being the cook seemed to bring a world of comfort to his companion.

"I am really much obliged to you, sir — what is the name? — Mr. Brandon. Yes, my name is Smith — Fordyce Smith. You arrived at a very opportune moment. This is the second time that sailor has scrapped with the Chink. The other time the cook nearly landed a kettle of boiling water on him, and these episodes are not pleasant. Then, to cap it all, I presume we'll have to stick here till midnight. By the way, just whereabouts are we?"

Val gave the desired information, but could not judge from the expression of Mr. Smith's face whether it was pleasing or otherwise.

"I have a motor-boat here, and if you wish we will run up to Cheney Landing and telephone to Rockland for a tug," suggested Val. "If there's none available, perhaps you can get the revenue cutter to haul you off. I saw the 'Woodbury' running in a couple of hours ago."

This was a sly dig, and Mr. Smith's face paled a little, but his answer was calm enough.

"Thank you for the offer, but don't trouble," said he. "In fact, we have sent the second mate for assistance and he'll probably scare up relief somewhere. If not, we'll get out a couple of anchors and try kedging her off on the next tide. Where's your motor-boat?"

Mr. Smith led the way to the ladder. Curiously enough the captain had not returned from his visit forward, nor had anyone appeared to care for the Chinaman. This person, however, had recovered from his daze. He staggered to his feet, and, bestowing on Val a look of suppressed rage, went forward. This look Val did not see as he accompanied Mr. Smith leisurely to the side; and that person chatted the meantime in a desultory manner, but kept — as Val noted in covert glances — his eyes rather nervously fixed on the forward part of the yacht. Arriving at the ladder the young skipper made his adieus and started to climb down, when Mr. Smith glanced at the motor-boat, and uttered an exclamation of surprise as he read her name.

“Show me your boat, will you?” he asked with some eagerness.

Val assented, and in the next few minutes Mr. Fordyce Smith made a careful inspection of the “Screamer.” He had no particular comment to offer, however, as he climbed back to his own deck; but during his visit he had casually elicited from the boys information regarding the location of their camp.

The fog had thinned considerably and the run back to the cove was made with little difficulty. They did not encounter again the row-boat with which they had collided, but of that they thought little, for the information Val had secured regard-

ing the "Penelope's" business was enough to take their minds off everything else. All the way back they discussed it, and on arriving at camp electrified the others by the news that the lunatic's story was turning out to be true. For the time being all thoughts of the triangle ciphers and the hidden treasure of the tilting rock were forgotten in the excitement of this new discovery.

"Yes, boys, the Chinese are out there on the 'Penelope,' and the thing that remains for us to decide now is, how shall we get ahead of the gang and land them in the hands of the law," said Val, decisively.

While Val and Jim had been gone Sumner and Carroll had been busy at the head of the cove with the clam-hoe. They had discovered the shell-fish in good numbers, and as they talked Carroll was washing the mud from a couple of pecks of them and preparing them for steaming in the camp kettle over the fireplace.

"I think we'd better run right up to the Landing and telephone Rockland," said he, looking up from his work. "It'll be dark early to-night, for it's cloudy, and the 'Dorabelle' will probably run around just as soon as they think it's safe to try. The two you saw in the row-boat must have been men from the schooner hunting for Field. If they knew the lay of this island they won't have any trouble finding the po'gy factory, and probably by this time Field's engineer will

have his engine in running order again. If we can get word to Rockland in time they can send down here and nab the whole bunch red-handed while they are transferring the Chinese from the schooner to the steamer."

"Yes, I think that's the right thing to do," was Jim's verdict. "Perhaps we can get the revenue cutter after them."

"I hate like fun to run for the police," broke in Sumner, to the surprise of everyone, for he was usually the most timid of all. "Wouldn't it be a feather in our caps if we could capture the whole of 'em single-handed? That would be something like!"

"By George!" suddenly exploded Carroll. "By George, I had almost forgotten!"

He stopped his supper preparations and began hunting through a box of rubbish that was to be burned in the camp-fire.

"Forgotten what?" demanded Val.

"Ah, here it is," Carroll cried, in a moment, as he pulled out a crumpled newspaper and opened it to an advertisement. "This came 'round some of the stuff you brought down from the store this morning, and it's only two days old. Listen:

" 'Five Hundred Dollars Reward! Any person giving information that will lead to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons who are reported to be endeavoring to smuggle Chinese into the United States from the Canadian Prov-

inces will be entitled to the above reward, etc., etc. The aforesaid smugglers are supposed to be operating by sea, and will probably try to make landing somewhere on the New England coast, etc.' ”

“ Boys,” said Val, breaking in quickly as Carroll concluded his reading, “ I believe that if we can only scare up the nerve we can dead easy capture the ‘ Dorabelle ’ to-night, captain, mate, crew, and Chinese cargo, turn ’em over to the authorities, and take that reward.” And he rapidly detailed a plan that had taken shape in his mind, while the others listened, doubtful and apprehensive at first, but at last coming into full accord with the scheme.

And now arose a most appetizing odor of steamed clams; but all the time supper was in progress the boys were busy working out the details for capturing the “ Dorabelle ” after she had taken the Chinese from the “ Penelope.”

“ In the first place we’ve got to know when the ‘ Dorabelle ’ starts from the po’gy factory to run around to the schooner,” said Val. “ I think that as soon as it begins to get dusky Cal and Sum better take a walk across the island and keep tabs on operations at the factory. Just as soon as the steamer gets underway, hustle back here and give us the word. We’ll put all the camp stuff, except the tent, back on the ‘ Screamer ’ and lock it up there; for if things work as I expect we may not

be back here to-night, and we don't want prowlers lugging anything off.

"Now this is the way the thing looks to me: Field will only let as many of his men in on this as are absolutely necessary to handle the steamer — the fewer the number the safer the secret. There will be Field, Pike, and probably Sanders, and Hixon, and the Chinese. They'll have to have a man at the wheel, an engineer and a fireman, and someone to keep the Chinamen in shape, and the four I have mentioned can probably attend to everything. I figure they will put the Chinamen into the forecastle and keep 'em there; the helmsman will be busy in the pilot-house, the engineer and the fireman at their stations, and that will leave Field to be tackled first."

And so they talked on till the plan, in theory at least, seemed to be well-nigh perfect.

As they had anticipated, night shut down early. The fog had about disappeared, for the wind had shifted to westerly, but heavy clouds obscured the moon. Inspection showed the "Penelope" still aground. It was after sunset when Carroll and Sumner started across the island; but, before they went, everyone had taken hold and put things aboard the "Screamer," which was to remain at anchor in the cove. The trip out to the "Dorabelle" after she had made fast to the schooner was to be made in the row-boat, for the noise of the motor-boat's exhaust would surely

alarm the smugglers. To be successful their coming must be a complete surprise. Jim had dug down into his "Kit" again and this time brought out a pair of 32-calibre revolvers. One of these he gave to Carroll and the other he stuck in his own hip pocket. This increased the arsenal to four weapons: three revolvers and one rifle. Then Val and Jim replenished the camp-fire and sat down before it to await the return of the others, thinking, as they did so, that such action might allay the suspicions of anyone Field might send to spy on their movements. They did not anticipate any attack, however, that night. They believed he would need all his forces on the steamer.

The tender was drawn up with her bow pointing off-shore, ready to be slid into the water at a moment's notice; but it was ten o'clock when a rustling in the bushes announced the boys' return.

"All aboard, fellows!" said Carroll, in a guarded tone. "The 'Dorabelle' left her wharf about ten minutes ago. Let's start now!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AT CLOSE QUARTERS

SOMEHOW, planning the capture of the "Dora-belle" and the actual work of capturing her were two very different things, and when the rowboat went noiselessly out of the cove that night it carried a very subdued quartette. As soon as Carroll and Sumner returned with word that the steamer had started, Val and Jim had gone down to the shore to see if they could tell when she came alongside the schooner; but it was so dark and misty off-shore that they found it hard even to locate the "Penelope" with accuracy, for she showed no lights.

So they started immediately, for it was very certain that if they could not see the schooner the crew of the schooner could not see them. Sumner and Carroll were at the oars, Jim in the bow, and Val steering. Val, Carroll and Jim had each a revolver and a pocket full of cartridges, while Sumner was in possession of the rifle. They had also brought a coil of small rope, and a big bunch of cotton waste, whose use will be shown later.

Conversation languished — nobody felt like talking. Indeed, I am quite inclined to think that only the firm determination on the part of each not to be a “squealer” kept them all from backing out of the enterprise.

“I see a red light down to the south’ard, boys,” presently announced Jim. “Maybe that’s the ‘Dorabelle’s’ port running-light.”

A few minutes later they came softly alongside the “Penelope’s” port side, and, pushing quietly aft, presently got a hold on her rudder and hung there, effectually concealed by the long overhang from the view of anyone on board.

It was highly presumable that if the po’gy steamer dared to come alongside and make fast in the shoal water, she would do so on the starboard or seaward side. And now as the approaching craft that Jim had noted came nearer, she showed not only her red port light, but her green starboard light as well.

“She’s heading right for us, boys,” whispered Val. “That *must* be the ‘Dorabelle.’”

And so it proved. The steamer came on and finally slowed down and stopped within a short distance of the stranded schooner. The voice of Mr. Fordyce Smith hailed from the quarter-deck right over the boys’ heads. In response to his invitation the “Dorabelle” crept cautiously closer.

“How much water you got there?” demanded a voice, recognizable as Field’s.

“ Sixteen feet under the stern and about four under the bow,” was Smith’s response. “ You can run alongside our quarter all right without striking. Is Dan Newton there, and that second mate of mine? ”

There was a reply in the affirmative, and then after a series of manoeuvres the po’gy steamer worked herself up till her waist was alongside the “ Penelope’s ” port quarter; but so deep was the dusk under the schooner’s overhang that not a suspicion did the smugglers have of the boys’ presence. There was not a particle of sea on — only a very long, slow, lazy swell — and the steamer made fast without trouble. Then came a few orders in an undertone, followed by a pattering of feet on the schooner’s deck. There was scratching and scrambling as the Chinamen climbed from one vessel to the other. When the transshipment was completed, the lines were cast off and the “ Dorabelle ” steamed slowly away, turning about in a wide curve, and heading out to sea.

But while this work had been going on, the boys were far from idle. Letting go their hold on the “ Penelope’s ” rudder-post, they worked carefully along toward the steamer’s stern, and finally secured a similar position there, making fast with the rowboat’s painter. They had the scare of their lives, however, soon after, for it seemed that the “ Penelope’s ” boat, which Dan Newton and the

second mate had taken when they rowed ashore, was trailing astern of the "Dorabelle," and discovery seemed almost inevitable when a man came aft, untied the painter from the taffrail, and towed the boat over to the schooner's quarter. But the person carried out his errand without the slightest suspicion of anything being amiss, and the boys breathed more easily.

It was at least ten minutes before they made any move to climb on board the steamer, and meantime their boat bobbed unceremoniously to and fro in the seething water thrown up by the propeller. When at length they thought matters might have settled down into regular routine, Val stood up and caught hold of the after guard. Carroll gave him a boost, and he pulled himself up and reached the after deck.

Val did not feel calm — far from it. He was decidedly nervous and uneasy; but he was plucky, too, and when a moment's reconnoitring showed there was no one in that part of the boat he gave his attention to helping his companions on board. Up they came, one after the other, and then, with firearms, rope, and cotton-waste handy, they crept forward in single file, Val ahead.

"We'll tackle the cabin first," he whispered, as they came to an open door from which emanated a conversation that alternated between loud tones and a nasal drawl. "I'll lead, and I want Cal and Sum to follow right behind me. Be ready

to shoot at the first sign of trouble; but don't try to hit anyone — least of all me.

“ Jim, you stand guard at the door, for if we have a fuss here the noise will likely bring somebody on the jump; in which case don't hesitate an instant. Hold 'em up sharp! ”

Leaving Jim stationed just outside the door, with firearms levelled and Val in the lead the others filed abruptly into the “ Dorabelle's ” apology for a cabin, and confronted the inmates. They were Captain Field and Mr. Fordyce Smith. Though the room was but poorly lighted by a swinging kerosene lamp, their faces clearly showed consternation. With an oath Smith started to his feet, and one hand moved toward a hip pocket.

“ Up with your hands! ” ordered Val, levelling his revolver full at the man's head.

“ Help! Pike! Sanders! Come quick! ” bel-
lowed Smith before the boys could interfere. And then Val fired. He did not hit Smith, and his only intent was to scare him into submission. The shot whistled close by his ear and buried itself in the woodwork, but its subduing effect was marvellous. The gentleman in the sporty clothing paled and dropped nervously into a chair. As for Field, the effect on him was much the same, and though he had been on the point of charging on the boys, he too, suddenly sat down.

“ Well, ” he said, with a sickly smile, “ you seem

to have us kind of at a disadvantage. What you up to, anyhow? ”

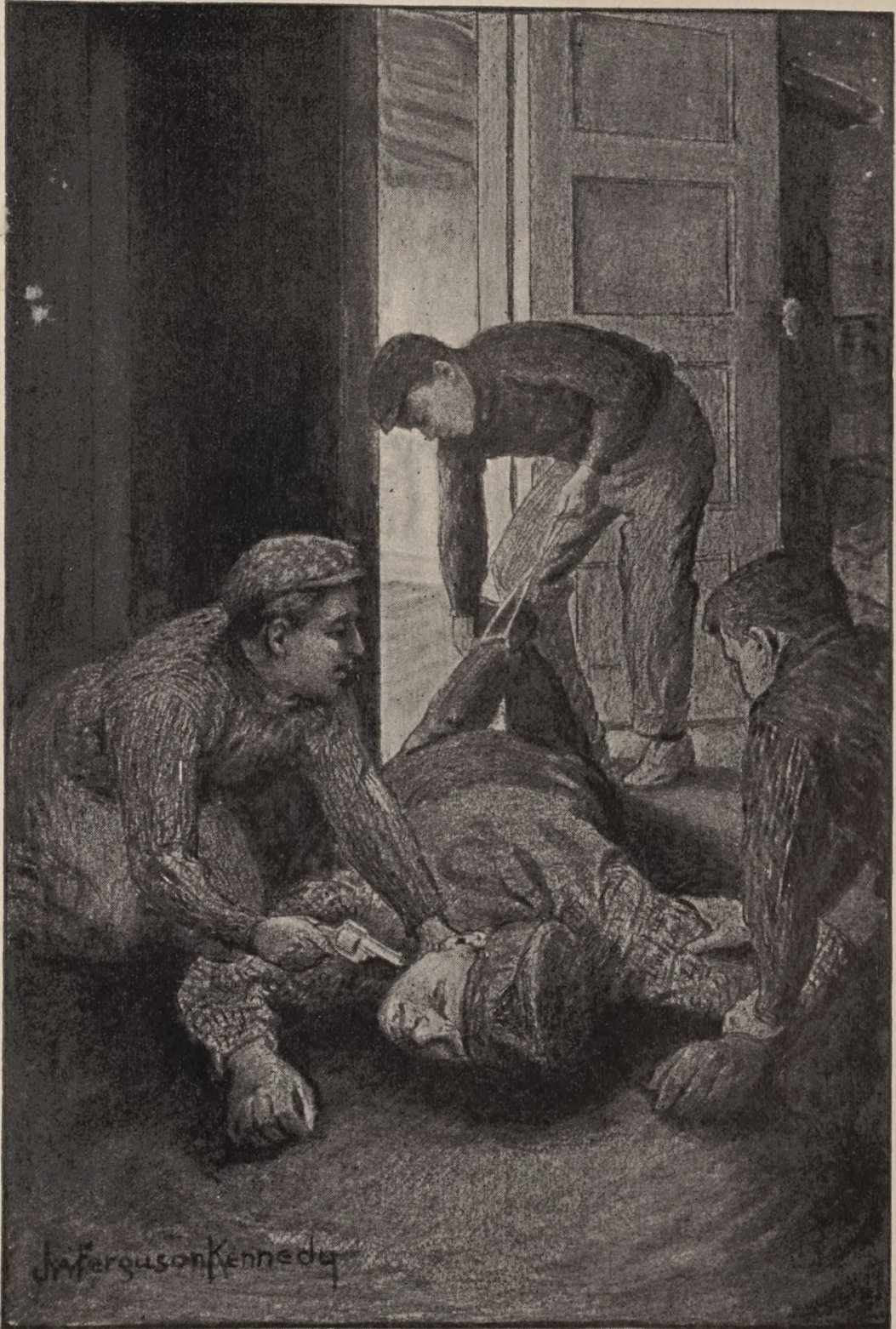
“ You’ll see, soon enough,” said Val, brusquely. “ Put up your hands and keep them up! ”

The command was this time obeyed, and in a trice a gag of cotton waste was thrust into the mouth of each to prevent further outcry, and tied there with several turns of cord around the head. Their ankles were next securely tied together, and then their hands brought together behind the chairs and also tied. Meantime Jim stood guard at the door awaiting any response to Smith’s call for help, or the coming of any one curious on account of the revolver shot; but to their relief no one appeared.

Two of the enemy were now taken care of, and leaving Sumner on guard with instructions to shoot at anyone who tried to release them -- which instructions were purposely made as bloodthirsty as possible, though none of the boys had any intention of really hitting anyone — Val led the way forward once more, followed by Carroll and Jim. At the engine-room door they next halted, and looked inside. Sanders was busily oiling up the engine.

“ Come out here a minute, Sanders,” called Val, drawing back. “ Come out here! ”

Rather surprised, but without a suspicion of the real state of affairs, the engineer pro-tempore stepped leisurely on deck.



“ HIS FEET AND WRISTS WERE FIRMLY TIED.”

“What do you want?” he asked.

The next instant his feet were knocked from under him, and he fell flat on his face with Val and Carroll on top of him. He began struggling desperately, but quieted down at once when he felt the cold muzzle of a revolver against his head. His feet and wrists were firmly tied and a gag put in his mouth and then Val picked him up by the shoulders, Carroll took his feet, and between them they tugged the fellow into the cabin and deposited him on the floor.

“That makes three,” said Val, laconically. Again he led the way forward, and entering the engine-room, looked down into the stoke-hole, where Hixon was in the act of putting a shovelful of coal into the furnace door.

“Hixon!” called Val. “Hixon, come up here!”

Hixon looked up to see the gleam of a revolver in Val’s hand, and he came up at once.

“Who’s on board beside you and Field, Sanders and Smith?” asked Val, holding the revolver in a prominent position.

“Why — why —” stammered the fellow, very much perturbed. “Why, there’s Captain Field, and Pike —”

“Where’s Pike?” demanded Carroll.

“In the pilot house,” was the reply.

“Anybody with him?”

“No.”

"Who else is here?" went on Val.

"Sanders, and me," continued Hixon with less hesitation, now that it seemed probable he would not be immediately shot, "and Heffler."

"Heffler?" repeated Val. "Where's Heffler, and what does he look like?"

"He was with the Captain, and he wears a checked suit."

"Aha, so Heffler and Mr. Fordyce Smith are one and the same, boys," said Val with a ring of elation in his voice. "I had begun to suspect as much, and it looks as if our net was gathering in more than we even hoped to catch."

"What are you going to do?" questioned Hixon, nervously. "You ain't revenue officers, are you?"

"No, we are not," retorted Val, "but you'll find we're just as good. Are the Chinese all down in the forecastle?"

"I don't know what you are driving at," replied Hixon, in assumed wonder, which did not deceive anyone. "What do you mean?"

"Never mind, then. Tie him, boys!" Val replied. In short order Hixon was served like the others, and taken to the cabin to be placed in Sumner's custody.

"We're gathering them in, one by one, Sum," announced Jim, as the latest acquisition was brought in. "We'll be in with Pike in a minute, and that'll complete the list."

The eyes of Heffler and Field snapped angrily at this declaration, but as their mouths were full of cotton waste they could not very well make any reply.

And now Val led the way forward again. They traversed the waist of the steamer, but instead of fishing equipment the deck was filled with barrels — presumably full of fish oil. There was not a Chinaman on deck. The night was damp and cool, and they had all been sent below, for fear their presence on board might become known. The forecastle doors were closed, though the companion slide was open for ventilation. Val bent over the opening, and in the poor illumination afforded in the forecastle he caught glimpses of forms huddled about in various attitudes. Some were in the bunks, some standing about, some squatted on the floor. A buzz of unintelligible conversation came up to his ears, mingled with an odor that was almost unbearable.

“It looks to me as if our greatest danger lay right here,” whispered Val as he drew back from the companionway, “but we’ll have to take a chance on leaving them as they are till we have Pike in limbo.” And the trio went softly up the stairs to the pilot-house, and entered the open door.

Except for the glow in the binnacle the pilot-house was dark. The helmsman stood looking ahead through the open windows, totally unaware

of approaching danger, until Val touched him on the shoulder. He turned suddenly to catch the glint of the revolver in the yachtsman's hand.

"We want you, Pike," said the latter, sharply.

It was too dark for Pike to recognize his visitors, but he acted on the instant.

"Revenue officers!" he exclaimed, under his breath. Abandoning the wheel, with one jump he broke through the group. Before the boys could do anything to prevent he darted out of the pilot-house, ran down the steps, and disappeared.

"Take the wheel, Cal, and head her up the bay. Jim and I will look after Pike. I guess he's gone for his gun."

Carroll seized the wheel and brought the steamer around until she headed in exactly the opposite direction; but in the meanwhile Val and Jim hurried to the deck, and went aft as fast as they could, looking for the mate. But they were not more than halfway to the cabin when they heard loud language. Then came the sound, muffled, of two rifle shots, followed by a man's yell.

"Great smoke!" exclaimed Val, "I'll bet Sum has winged him!"

They entered the cabin to find the place hazy with rifle smoke, through which they could see Sumner with lowered weapon gazing in a horrified way at Pike, who was sprawled out on the floor just inside the door. The mate was far from dead,

though, for he groaned and tried ineffectually to rise as Val stepped to his side.

"I had to shoot, Val," cried Sumner, "for in another second he would have knocked my head off; but I fired at his feet, and guess he isn't killed, is he?"

"Killed? No!" Val retorted, savagely, as he pulled Pike to a sitting posture, and helped him into a chair. "You can't kill such a liar and sneak as he is; I'll bet he's more scared than hurt."

Jim tied the mate's wrists behind his chair, and Val investigated his wounds. One of Sumner's bullets had drawn blood from the calf of his left leg, while the other had gone through the toe of one of his boots and imbedded itself in the floor, making a clean hole without touching the foot at all.

"You great baby!" jeered Val, contemptuously. "Where is your sand? That was a terrible bluff you put up to me the other night, wasn't it? But it doesn't go down now. We've nailed you at last, you and the rest of the gang, and we'll land you where you belong or break something trying!"

"Aren't you going to do anything for my leg?" whined the mate, his courage pretty far gone. "It smarts like fire."

"It will have to smart for awhile, then," returned Val, with an apparent callousness that he

was far from feeling. "It's nothing but a scratch, anyhow, and we've no time to fool with you."

The gags were now taken from the mouths of the four first captured; but their arms and legs were left securely fastened. They made a most sour and angry-looking group.

"Where are you taking us?" demanded Heffler the instant he was able to speak.

Val paid no attention to him.

"I'm sorry to find you engaged in this business," he remarked to the Captain, as he removed the wad of cotton waste that had been stopping his utterance.

"What business are you alludin' to?" asked Field, angrily, after he had vehemently spit out a few strands of thread that had been left behind. "I'll have you know this is piracy, you — you —!" he sputtered incoherently in his rage.

"Cut it out!" advised Val, curtly. "It isn't piracy that ails you — it's smuggling!" And he and Jim abruptly departed for the engine-room where for some minutes the machinery had been running without any attention. But Sumner was left on guard still, and he noticed that Val's sharp remark made Heffler's jaw drop, and his face grow noticeably pale.

"What are *you* getting out of this?" Field inquired of Sumner, after a few moments' reflection. "Ain't doing it for fun, be you?"

"Five hundred dollars' reward," was the short reply.

"Is that all?" sniffed the Captain. "You're taking big chances for mighty little money.

"Say," he went on, in a confidential tone, "if you'll let us loose we'll give you a thousand dollars."

"Make it two thousand, won't you?" asked Sumner. "That would give us five hundred apiece and be more of an object, you know." And the youngster grinned back cheerfully at Field, whose jaws suddenly shut with a snap.

"Oh, dry up, Field, you make me tired," interposed Heffler. "Can't you see the boy's stringing you?" Whereupon conversation in the cabin of the "Dorabelle" abruptly stopped.

Jim stirred up the fire under the boiler, while Val whistled up to Carroll through the tube, and announced the capture of the mate.

"We're going to try and fasten in the Chinese now," he went on, "and then we'll shove this old hooker for Rockland for all she's worth!"

"I can see the searchlight of a steamer ahead," announced Carroll. "She seems to be coming this way. I think we'd better try to attract her attention."

"Surely. How far off is she?"

"A quarter of a mile, maybe. It's hard to tell."

"Wait till we get the forecastle companion

fastened. Then when I shout, you blow the distress signal."

Leaving Jim at work on the fire, Val went forward to the fore-castle. A glance showed him that the inmates were grouped about much the same as before. The disturbances on board had evidently not attracted their attention — at least not enough to alarm them. He slid the hatch shut and fastened it.

"All right, Cal!" he called loudly. "Let her go!"

Carroll immediately began a series of shrieks on the whistle, and Val stepped to the rail and looked ahead. The steamer was invisible in the darkness, but her search-light was brilliant, and as the distress signals arose from the fishing steamer it swept slowly around from west to east, here and there, till at last it rested on the "Dorabelle."

And now, as Carroll for a moment released the whistle cord, answering toots came from the other craft. She was close at hand, and, as Val stood watching, her searchlight suddenly was turned full upon him. Its brightness made him blink. He turned to go back to the engine-room, for it was almost time to stop the machinery; but, as he did so, somebody seized him violently from behind, and, before he could make any determined resistance, lifted him in the air and threw him bodily over the rail into the sea!

Over his shoulder as he fell he glimpsed a Chinese head. He uttered a loud cry, but it was drowned by the renewed shrieks of the whistle. Then he struck the water, and went down — deeper and deeper into the chilly waves of Penobscot Bay.

Though Val struck out with all his might it seemed as if he would never start back toward the surface; and as he struggled the thought came to him that the Chinaman he had knocked over with the belaying pin had taken this way to “get square.”

The “Dorabelle” was no ocean greyhound, but by the time Val had risen to the top and blown the water from his mouth and nose she had left him behind. But the beam of that searchlight was resting on the water where he had gone down, and as he came up and began swimming it kept playing on him, for the Chinaman’s assault had been seen by the pilot of the other boat. Val made no outcry, for he needed his energy to keep afloat, hampered as he was with the clothing necessary for a cool night on the water; but an encouraging hail came from the strange steamer. A boat splashed overside, and before he had become exhausted it reached and took him in.

The boat contained two seamen and a young officer. The latter asked a few general questions of Val, but devoted himself principally to getting his boat back to the steamer as soon as possible.

As for Val, he sat, dripping but warm from his exertions, and tried to regain his breath, which he had done by the time they came alongside. Then he inquired the identity of the vessel that had rescued him.

"Revenue cutter 'Woodbury,'" was the reply.

"I must see your Captain at once," insisted Val.

A companion-ladder had been dropped over the side, and without waiting for ceremony he hurriedly climbed to the cutter's deck. Hailing the first person he met he requested to be taken to the Captain, and when in a few moments he had the pleasure of meeting that person, the latter received an announcement that rather electrified him.

"My name is Brandon," said Val, rather unsteadily, while water dripped from him in copious streams, "and I have the pleasure of reporting the capture of the po'gy steamer 'Dorabelle' with a lot of smuggled Chinese on board, and five of the smugglers."

But sudden surprises were an everyday occurrence to the able commander of the government boat, and this one did not prevent him from taking prompt action. The "Woodbury" instantly went about in pursuit of the "Dorabelle," for the latter had gone some distance past before stopping, since Jim in the stoke-hole had at first

paid no attention to Carroll's signals to slow down and stop, as he thought Val was on duty.

As the sea was still calm the cutter made fast alongside the po'gy steamer, and a detail of seamen transferred the prisoners from Sumner's care to more secure quarters. The Chinese were taken care of — the one roaming the vessel at large being quickly captured — and a temporary crew was put in charge of the steamer.

Then, acting still on information given by the boys, the "Woodbury" ran up to and took possession of the stranded "Penelope," putting her entire crew under arrest. Having thus satisfied for the present the demands of the law, the cutter put a hawser aboard the schooner, and, the tide being high, succeeded after a little effort in pulling her into deep water.

By the time all this had been accomplished it was long past midnight; and as the fog had again set in thickly, compelling all three vessels to anchor, at the invitation of the "Woodbury's" Captain the boys were quartered aboard for the rest of the night.

• It was after eight o'clock before a westerly breeze arose and scattered the fog. Then, having eaten a good breakfast, the boys started for camp in the rowboat, well pleased with the results of the night's work.

Tired but happy they rounded the southern point of the cove's entrance. It was Jim at the

bow who first noticed that something was wrong. He rubbed his eyes twice before saying a word. Then he gave a shout of dismay.

“Boys!” cried he; “boys, the ‘Screamer’s’ gone!”

CHAPTER XIX

THE EX-ENGINEER REAPPEARS

THERE was not the slightest doubt about the matter. The cove was bare from end to end — the “Screamer” was gone.

In great dismay the boys disembarked, and hardly waiting to beach the boat, ran up to camp. The tent stood in its place, but it had been disturbed, for the fly was unfastened and partly opened. Sumner ran ahead and looked inside. What he saw surprised him, for he uttered a cry of astonishment, and the others immediately hurried up.

Spread in confusion on the floor of the tent were the personal effects that had been left on the “Screamer” the night before. There they all were — bedding, clothing, food, the four chairs from the cockpit — everything that was not part and parcel of the motor-boat’s equipment had been brought ashore. It was a mystifying affair, and, to crown all, there was no word of explanation anywhere — not a vestige of a message to tell who had taken the “Screamer,” or why.

A hasty conference at once took place.

"We've got rid of Field and Pike and Sanders and Hixon and Heffler," remarked Sumner, dolefully, "and I certainly thought we'd have a little chance now to hunt for the tilting rock."

"No such luck," Jim declared. "I'll bet that treasure is hoodooed, boys! It's hoodooed, and we'll have nothing but trouble as long as we stay here!"

"Oh, forget it!" admonished Val, disgustedly. "I know we're all tired, Jim, but there's no need of flying off the handle like that. When we can find time to hunt we'll have chance enough. But just now somebody has stolen our boat, and we've got to find it."

"How about the negro?" suggested Carroll. "We didn't get him, and perhaps he's broken loose again around here."

"No, I don't believe so," was Val's thoughtful reply. "That man is a destructive brute, and if he had come again, it stands to reason he would only have smashed things. But why did the person who took the 'Screamer' take so much pains to put our things ashore? I can only account for it on the ground that he thought the boat was his; can anyone think of anybody that might fit such a description?"

A light broke over Carroll's face, and he was about to reply, when the conversation was interrupted by the noise of someone hurrying through

the bushes near the head of the cove. Heretofore only enemies had come from that direction, so they waited in some apprehension for the person to appear. In a moment Marshall came in sight, and he did not stop till he had reached the centre of the camp. His clothing was in the same unkempt state as on the day before, and in his eyes shone the same insane light.

"Where are the smugglers?" he asked, looking sharply around. "Where are the Chinese?"

"We captured them last night," said Val, quietly. "They are now on the revenue cutter. They won't trouble you again."

"That is good; but the 'Screamer' is gone — gone," returned the lunatic, pointing to the cove. "I say your boat is gone!" he cried, stamping his foot.

"Gone where, and who took her?" quickly asked Val, realizing that here was a source of information of which he had not thought.

"I was waiting and watching — watching and waiting through the night for the smugglers," explained Marshall, with an air of infinite craftiness. "The Chinese didn't come, but before midnight two men arrived in a rowboat."

"Who were they?" questioned Jim.

"It was too dark to see their faces, though they had a lantern," was the reply, "but one of them was tall.

"They were surprised not to find anyone here,"

said Marshall, with scarcely a trace of his customary nervousness. He seemed to be telling the truth, and the boys were impressed accordingly.

"Tell us all about it," requested Val; and the ex-engineer continued.

"I was right there," and he pointed out behind the boulder that backed the fireplace. "I heard the boat grate on the sand, and then the two men came up to the camp.

" 'Nobody's at home,' said the tall man after he had been to the tent, 'but we'll take the 'Screamer' just the same. Come on, let's put their stuff ashore, and get out of here.'

"I watched them every minute. They put your stuff in the tent, and then they got on the 'Screamer' and went away."

"Which way did they go?" Val asked.

"To the hotel at Rockland Breakwater," was the illuminating reply.

"Are you sure?"

"That's where they said they were going."

"Then hooray, boys! This lets us out!" exclaimed Val, looking cheerful for the first time since coming ashore. "Who'll go right up to Rockland with me?"

"Guess we all will, fast enough," chuckled Cal, while Sumner and Jim registered a vigorous assent to the proposal. "If there's going to be another round-up, we want a hand in it.

"Did you know the crew of the 'Woodbury' didn't find Dan Newton on the 'Penelope' this morning?" Cal added, significantly.

"And the second mate was gone, too," added Jim.

"Don't rub it in," grimaced Val. "I've got an idea who took the 'Screamer' myself. And it looks as if I had really sold the 'Spitfire' for just the five hundred dollars that Mr. Manning gave me to boot. But there is one thing I'm going to do the minute I reach Cheney Landing, and that is: get Captain Roderick on the long-distance telephone and find out the real history of that motor-boat. Then I'll know what to do next."

Just as Val made this announcement they were all surprised to hear the puffing of a launch entering the cove.

"The 'Screamer's' coming back, boys," cried Sumner, and with one accord they all, with the exception of Marshall, ran down to the water. The lunatic had slumped down in a chair, and seemed absorbed in meditation. A power-boat containing three men was approaching, but it was a dory-launch, bearing very little resemblance to the missing cruiser. Coming to the head of the cove the launch was run up on the sand, and one of her occupants jumped out.

"Seen anything of a crazy man around here?" he inquired, walking over to the boys.

"Yes; why?" replied Val.

"My name is Billings, and I'm an officer from the Insane Asylum at Augusta," the man explained. "We're looking for a lunatic who was committed from this island last year. He escaped several days ago, and we understand he is back here again."

"If you will walk up that path a little ways, Mr. Billings," Val returned, indicating the way to the camp, "you ought to find your man."

"Is he violent?"

"Well, not so very," Jim said, while the others laughed.

Billings turned and spoke to his companions.

"He's right up here," said he. "Knight, you come along, and we'll take him."

Without waiting for anyone to join him, Billings started briskly up to camp, and had disappeared among the trees before Knight was more than out of the boat. The boys also went back toward the tent, but they had not taken half a dozen steps before a terrific howl came from the top of the knoll. This outburst was followed by a series of unintelligible expletives, after which came a crackling and crashing as if somebody was hurrying through the bushes at breakneck pace.

"Help! Help! Stop him!" loudly implored a voice, and, as the boys entered the camp enclosure, Mr. Billings burst forth from the bushes at the back, closely followed by the lunatic, who was

brandishing the negro's axe. In and out among the trees they ran, and then twice around the boulder back of the fireplace, the pursuer wild with insane frenzy, the pursued almost overcome with fright; till finally, when the engineer was almost upon him, the other made a desperate dash down the slope toward the cove.

The boys, who, too surprised to act, had been for an instant gazing at the fracas, stepped hurriedly out of the path, and Billings ran past them; but, as the crazy man came along behind, Jim stuck out a foot and tripped him very neatly. He lunged forward, striking his head with great force against a tree, and rolled up in a heap.

When Billings found that he was no longer pursued he stopped running and came back, accompanied by Knight and the owner of the launch. The first was puffing hard, and perspiration stood in beads on his forehead.

"Heavens, but that was a close call," he said, in an agitated voice, as he came up to where the boys were rolling Marshall over on his back and placing him in a more comfortable position.

"How did you manage to stir him up like that?" asked Val, curiously, as he felt for the engineer's heart, and found that it was still beating, though the man was unconscious.

"I never did a thing," declared the man from the asylum. "I put my hand on his shoulder

and said that I wanted him to come along with me."

"Probably he recognized you, Billings," Knight suggested.

"He certainly seemed to," admitted Billings, somewhat shamefacedly. "Anyhow, he let out a roar, jumped for the axe, and took after me. And I — well — it all came so quick that I was startled — some."

"Yes, when we saw you legging it through the bushes and around that rock we felt that you might be startled — that is, just a *trifle* startled," retorted Knight; and at this sally everyone, even Billings, had to smile, which relieved the nervous tension a good deal.

Cool water was brought, and the engineer's head bathed for some time, but he gave no signs of regaining his senses. A bloody bruise on the right side of the head, just where the livid scar had been, showed where he had come into violent contact with the tree. So, as they had no other means of restoration at hand to try, it was determined to take him at once in the launch to a doctor at the Landing. The owner of the motor-boat, the "Antelope" as she was named, was willing to take the boys along, too, for they wanted to get on the trail of the "Screamer," but were not particularly anxious to row the length of the island.

The boys made hasty changes in their wearing

apparel, everything was put back into the tent, and the fly fastened. Then the lunatic was carried carefully down the slope and placed on some cushions in the bottom of the launch, and the party started.

The "Antelope" was by no means as fast as the "Screamer," but she made fair speed, and it was a great deal easier than rowing. The boys questioned the men about the "Screamer," but although one of them — the owner of the launch — had been on or near the water since five o'clock that morning, none of them had seen her.

"But if they've gone to the Breakwater it's a cinch to locate her," said the launch owner, "for you know you can telephone the hotel right from the Landing."

"Shovel in the coal, I tell you!" exclaimed a voice from the bottom of the launch. "I say, stick the coal to her, you lubber. You can't expect to get steam without fire!"

At this sudden outburst everyone turned in astonishment. The engineer was sitting up, consciousness regained, and his eyes no longer held the light of insanity. But he was talking loudly and earnestly, not realizing where he was.

"Fenderson," he called. "Wake up, there! The gage is dropping! My heavens, man, if ever we wanted steam we want it now! Have you gone to sleep? Rustle that shovel lively, or I'll come down there —"

And then the ex-engineer realized that he was not in the engine-room of the steam-yacht "Sea Rover" — that there was no tempest tossing his vessel, no fight on between steam and storm. With startled eyes he looked at the dingy launch, and into the faces of strange persons.

"Where am I?" he demanded. "Where's the 'Sea Rover'? What has happened?"

Surgeons tell us that sometimes when a severe blow on the head has fractured the skull, a small portion of the bone will be forced down upon the brain in such a way as to disarrange its functions, causing in some cases loss of memory, or paralysis, or insanity. And then, too, they tell us, that sometimes when this pressure is removed from the brain by the loosening and lifting away of the piece of bone that has been driven inward, the brain will resume its normal action, memory will return, the paralysis disappear, the insanity vanish.

This is what had happened to Marshall, who one year before had slipped and fallen on the stoke-hole steps while the yacht was pitching in a storm, had struck his head, and become unconscious; some hours afterward regaining consciousness in an insane condition. The blow he had just received by his fall against the tree had loosened the fragment of bone that for the past year had been pressing on his brain, and now he had come back to life sane once more, to pick up

the thread of existence just where he had dropped it when he fell on the stoke-hole steps — for the events of the year that intervened between that time and this would always be a blank to him.

“ I don’t understand,” he weakly murmured. “ What’s the matter? ”

Of all the persons in the launch I think that Val Brandon best understood what had occurred in the case of the engineer. He conversed with him quietly, recalling to his mind the conditions on the yacht “ Sea Rover ” during the storm, and that he had fallen. He explained that since that time his head had not been right; but that a blow in the same place had evidently been the means of his restoration.

“ How long have I been sick? Several weeks? ” inquired Marshall.

“ It’s over a year since you had the fall,” said Val; and at the engineer’s urgent request he explained — as far as he knew — what had occurred to the unfortunate man while he was insane.

“ Are they taking me back to the asylum now? ” he asked, with a shiver, when Val had concluded his story.

“ That’s where they intended to take you, but after this I don’t think it will be necessary,” said Val, reassuringly.

The engineer lay back wearily on the cushions, and relapsed into silence.

In a trifle over an hour after leaving the camp the "Antelope" reached Cheney Landing, and the boys hurried to the telephone at the company store.

Val soon got the Breakwater Hotel on the line, and inquired if a Mr. Dan Newton was staying there. After a pause for investigation the clerk replied that no such person was at the hotel.

"Didn't two men come to your place this morning in a motor-boat named the 'Screamer'?" persisted the young skipper.

Another short wait ensued while the clerk sought further information. He presently reported that two men had arrived early that morning in a cruising motor-boat, but as they had not yet registered he could not tell their names.

"Is it possible for you to find out the name of that boat?" asked Val. "It is extremely important that I should know."

That clerk certainly showed an accommodating spirit, for he made more inquiries, and presently said that the boat was the "Screamer," that she was tied up at the Breakwater landing, and the two men who had come in her were on board.

Val next succeeded in getting connected with Captain Roderick in Stroudport. Briefly he told what had happened to the "Screamer." This was the first time the Captain had heard about Val's swapping the "Spitfire" for the motor-boat. He was very much worked up over the situation.

"I can't tell you the story of that boat over the telephone," he insisted, in reply to Val's questions, "but you go up to Rockland and take possession. She's yours, all right, and you just muckle on to her! Bring her over to Tillson's wharf, and tie up there, and I'll catch the very first train down and meet you this afternoon with all the papers in the case. I can settle those fellows in short order, and I'd just like to have the chance."

This assurance from the Captain comforted Val a great deal.

"Boys," he cried, turning from the instrument, "the Captain says to go up to Rockland and seize the 'Screamer,' and he'll be down this afternoon to settle matters."

"That's the stuff!" declared Carroll. "Now we've started in this seizing business we'd better see it through to a finish."

By this time the steamer was already whistling for the Landing, and they reached the wharf just as the "Governor Bodwell" made fast. The men from Augusta were assisting Marshall up the gang-plank, and explained that it would be necessary to take him to the Asylum for an examination into his mental condition; but if it proved that his reason had been fully restored, he would, of course, be discharged. As for the engineer himself, he did not as yet seem to quite realize what had happened to him. He was taking matters with calm philosophy, however, and made no

objection to accompanying the men. It ultimately turned out that he was discharged from the Asylum as entirely restored to reason.

The boys seated themselves on the forward deck, and kept a sharp lookout for signs of the missing motor-boat as the steamer moved toward Rockland. The "Governor Bodwell" would not touch at the Breakwater, but it might be possible to make out the "Screamer" if she was tied up there.

"This is where we need the binoculars," Cal remarked, as they came in by the miniature lighthouse on Owl's Head, and headed into Rockland Harbor, without any sign of a motor-boat resembling Val's. "It's about two miles across the harbor at the breakwater, and we'll probably be over a mile from that wharf when we pass. Can you read four-inch letters a mile off with the naked eye, old man?" This being the size of the letters on the "Screamer's" bow.

But Val did not reply. The steamer was now abreast of the Breakwater hotel, and the boat landing at the foot of the slope below it, inside the mile-long breakwater with the white lighthouse at its end. The captain of the treasure-seekers secured the loan of a glass from the pilot-house, and scrutinized the numerous small craft that were anchored inside the breakwater. The "Screamer" was not among them.

"But she must be somewhere in the harbor,"

declared Sumner, "for we haven't seen her go out by us."

In due time the "Governor Bodwell" reached her landing in Rockland. As the pilot brought her skilfully in Jim uttered a cry of delight. Two boat-lengths away a motor-boat was tied up at a float, and the letters on her stern spelled "Screamer."

CHAPTER XX

CONCERNING THE "SCREAMER"

"WE don't go to the Breakwater then, after all," remarked Val, when Jim had called their attention to the "Screamer." "Now's the time to strike! Come on!"

"Have you got your bill of sale with you, Val, in case they kick up a fuss?" was Carroll's question, as they hurried along the wharf.

Val nodded and tapped his coat.

"And we'll get into a fuss all right, don't you worry," said he. "It's been nothing else ever since we struck Penobscot Bay, and I guess it's too early for it to stop now."

Down the flight of steps to the float ran the boys, and climbed aboard the "Screamer." No one was in the cockpit, but the companionway was open, and they filed into the engine-room, not anxious for trouble but expecting it.

Val was in the lead, but he found no one in the engine-room and galley. From the cabin, however, came the sound of a subdued snore. There on a transom sound asleep lay a young man,

and a hasty inspection proved him to be the only person on board.

"Wake up!" said Val, shaking the sleeper, and he did wake, almost instantly. He sat up at once and regarded in wonder the four young men who had invaded his quiet. But before he could make any remarks Val spoke.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Stuart," was the surprised reply.

"Where's Dan Newton?" next inquired Val. An odd expression passed over the other's face.

"Where's who?" he inquired, and Val repeated the question.

"Never heard of him," he declared, positively, "but if you want Mr. Williams, he's gone ashore. He's the owner."

"Oh, is that so?" retorted Val, somewhat sarcastically. "And I believe you are the second mate of the 'Penelope,' aren't you?"

"What's the 'Penelope?'" inquired Stuart. "I say," he insisted, with a show of irritation, "what are you fellows doing on this boat, anyway? You're altogether too fresh, that's what you are. I advise you to get out of here!"

"Say the word, Val," Carroll whispered in his chum's ear, "and we'll bundle him ashore so quick he'll think he was always bundled."

But Val waved Carroll back.

"Tell me," he went on, addressing Stuart,

" why you and this Williams took the ' Screamer ' last night? "

" Oho! " cried Stuart, rising to his feet. " Is that what ails you? Well, then, I'll tell you. This boat was built for Mr. Williams, and he can show you a clean bill of sale of her! "

" If that's the case, how did it happen that Captain Roderick of Stroudport came into possession of her? And what was your Mr. Williams doing all this time? "

" I must confess that gets me, just a little, " admitted Stuart, with apparent candor. " Williams had the boat built for him a year ago last spring in Boston and kept her at Marblehead. One night she disappeared, and he never saw hide nor hair of her until last week at Stroudport — "

" When he and Mr. Heffler were running out of the harbor on the ' Penelope, ' " interjected Carroll, " and the ' Screamer ' with three men on board went past. "

" Well, you may know what you're talking about, but I don't, " said Stuart.

" You mean to say you never heard of the ' Penelope ' ? " broke in Val, sharply.

" No, I never did, " was the prompt assertion. " One thing is certain, though. You boys haven't any business on this boat, and you can get ashore peaceably now, or be fired ashore with a rough-house a little later. "

" Pick up your duds, and get out yourself, "

Val ordered, by way of reply. "This boat belongs to me and I'm going to take her."

"You'd better not try it," warned Stuart, yet realizing he would be no match for his visitors. "It'll be the worst mess you ever struck."

"Oh, I guess not," said Val, grimly. "Let's chuck these suit-cases ashore, fellows, and then if Mr. Stuart doesn't care to go along quietly we'll chuck him ashore, too."

And in spite of the vigorous remonstrances of Stuart, Jim and Sumner picked up two suit-cases and some other personal property, carried them into the cockpit and tossed them unceremoniously upon the float. Then, impelled firmly toward the outer air by Val and Cal, Mr. Franklin Stuart — if that was really his name — was induced much against his will to take his departure from the "Screamer." I regret to state that he swore with great vigor during the course of his ejection, but he made no very determined resistance, for he realized that in the end anything of that sort would only mean more trouble for himself. He found himself in short order on the float beside the baggage, and as he watched the boys cast off the lines he relieved himself of sundry biting remarks.

"Why not have him arrested for stealing?" suggested Jim, as the "Screamer" lay at rest a short distance from the float, and the evicted

one continued his slurring remarks, to which no one replied.

"I'd have 'em both pinched for stealing and smuggling," remarked Sumner.

"Easy — easy — don't let him hear the word smuggling," remonstrated Val. "Did you ever see this man before?"

Nobody had.

"Then I don't see how we can have him arrested for smuggling," the skipper said, in an undertone, "and as for stealing the 'Screamer,' I think we'd better let that matter rest till the Captain shows up."

Carroll had started the engine — though the propeller was not moving — when Val turned to the man on the float.

"You're wasting your breath," he said, coolly. "If you and Williams have any evidence to show why you should keep this boat, be on hand at three o'clock this afternoon, and we'll be here ready to talk with you." And without further delay the motor-boat started away from the wharf.

"That was easy," said Jim, happily, grinning back at the discomfited Stuart, who had stopped talking and was merely shaking his fist after them.

"Lordy, but that was a pie!" Sumner asserted, while Cal stuck his head out of the engine-room to make a comment of a similar nature.

Val, however, looked uneasy.

"I only hope," he replied, "that the Captain

will show up as he promised; for if he doesn't we may all get pulled in for stealing the 'Screamer' ourselves."

It lacked five minutes to three o'clock that afternoon when the "Screamer" came briskly up to Tillson's wharf, and stopped a short distance from the float she had left earlier in the day. It had not been possible to return to Whale Island and continue the treasure search and still keep their appointment with Captain Roderick, so at Carroll's suggestion they had run down to a place called Crescent Beach, where they landed and had a shore dinner — one that was so satisfying to their eager appetites that for the time-being it put in the background all the matters that were troubling them.

There was no one on the float when the "Screamer" arrived, but within a minute two men appeared and came down the steps. One of them was Stuart; the other was the tall, dark-complexioned young man they had seen with Heffler on the "Penelope" in Stroudport harbor.

"Do you see the Captain, boys?" asked Val, anxiously, paying no attention to the two men, who were calling for him to bring the boat up to the float.

"Train is due at two-forty-five," remarked Jim, who had looked the matter up.

"Ah, there he is," said Val, at that moment,

much relieved, as they saw three more men appear at the head of the steps, the Captain in the lead. When Captain Roderick saw the boys he beckoned vigorously.

"It's all right," he called. "Bring her in. We're ready for 'em."

In response to this summons the "Screamer" ran in and made fast. Jim put the ladder over and the Captain got aboard. His two companions, however, remained at the top of the steps, while Stuart and his friend — who was undoubtedly Williams — conversed together in low tones and glanced uneasily from time to time up at the wharf as if expecting someone.

"Well, you've got her, anyhow," remarked the Captain cheerily, as he shook hands all around, "and they say possession's nine points of the law."

"But the question is: are we going to keep her?" said Val; and he hurriedly detailed the incidents connected with the "Screamer's" disappearance, and his suspicions as to the identity of the men who had taken her.

"Where are the fellows that say this boat belongs to them?" demanded the Captain.

"Right here," said a strange voice behind the group. "Officer, do your duty. These four youngsters are the ones that stole the 'Screamer' from me this morning."

Unobserved by the party on the motor-boat

during their consultation with the Captain, a policeman had come down to the float, and now, accompanied by Williams and Stuart, he came to the side of the cruiser. As Williams spoke the officer climbed on board.

"I arrest you four young men on the charge of stealing this boat," he announced, and brought into sight papers that were presumably warrants.

"This is getting rather overgrown," declared Captain Roderick, very much exasperated, while the boys, who were depending wholly on his efforts to get them out of the mess, said little but looked greatly disgusted.

There was nothing to be done, however, but accompany the officer to the police station, and everyone went — Val, Carroll, Sumner and Jim accompanied by the policeman; and gloomy enough they felt and looked, for it seemed like a great disgrace to be under arrest, even though innocent of any wrongdoing. Following them came Williams and Stuart, and behind those the Captain, conversing under his breath with his friends Thompson and Baldwin, the men who had accompanied him to the wharf. Before the station was reached, however, Mr. Thompson had left the party, and his object in doing so was apparent when they reached their destination, for the sergeant informed the arresting officer that the Judge who had issued the warrants had telephoned to have the prisoners brought directly

to his office. So, without even being booked at the station, the four sallied out again, with their escort, and presently the party found themselves in the office of the municipal Judge, where, also, was Mr. Thompson. At the Judge's invitation everyone became seated.

"I have taken this very unusual method of procedure," remarked that gentleman, "because I am informed by Mr. Thompson that this whole matter is the result of a misunderstanding of the facts in the case. This noon Mr. Williams applied to me for warrants for the arrest of four men, who, he asserted, had stolen his motor-boat."

As he said this, the Judge glanced at Williams and Stuart, who were sitting, rather ill at ease, near Thompson and Baldwin.

"Mr. Williams exhibited a bill of sale of the boat, dated over a year ago, and said she had been built for him in Boston. There seemed to be evidence enough to justify the arrests, so I issued the warrants.

"Now if there is anything more to this case than appears on the surface, let's have it cleared up. Young man," continued the Judge, addressing Val, "what have you to say?"

Briefly Brandon told the story of swapping the "Spitfire" for the "Screamer," and showed his copy of the agreement made with Mr. Manning.

"Captain Roderick sold the 'Screamer' to

Mr. Manning," he added. "He brought her to Stroudport, and ought to know all about her."

All eyes now turned curiously upon the Captain, who for some moments had been stirring uneasily, though he patiently waited his turn to speak. But the minute he got his innings he briskly attacked the business in hand.

"Is your name Williams?" he demanded, pointing a stubby forefinger at the claimant to the "Screamer."

"Call it Daniel Newton Williams and you'll hit it nearer right," was the reply. "What of it?"

"And your friend, there; he's the second mate of the 'Penelope,' ain't he?"

"He was the second mate, but just now he's taking a vacation. But I fail to see what all this has to do with the case in hand."

"Probably not," was the sententious reply, "but you will later."

At this instant Val caught Stuart's eye, but that person was not at all abashed by his companion's admissions. He grinned and winked knowingly, as if his prevarications had been a great joke.

"I understand, Mr. Williams," continued the Captain, "that you claim the 'Screamer' was built for you in Boston last year. Is that so?"

"She was built for me a year ago last spring. I have the bill of sale here."

“ When did you see her last — I mean till just recently? ”

“ It was a year ago last June,” replied Williams, readily enough. “ I was cruising in her in Massachusetts Bay with a small party of friends. We had been down in Penobscot Bay, and were going south; but one afternoon a steamer ran into us in a heavy fog, and cut us down to the water line. My boat began to fill, and we, thinking she was going down, took to the row-boat and left her. It took us five hours to row ashore — we finally landed at Cohasset — and that was the last time I set eyes on her till she ran by us in Stroudport harbor last week. And I’m naturally curious to know how she was kept from sinking, and how you got hold of her; and, most of all, by what right or title you held and sold her.”

“ Did you stay around Boston after this little adventure of yours? ” inquired the Captain, still on information bent.

“ No, sir; I went away within a week.”

“ Gone long? ”

“ It was over a year ago before I set foot in Massachusetts again,” was the reply.

“ Guess you didn’t read the advertisements in the papers, either,” grinned his interrogator, “ or else you’d be wiser than you seem to be now.

“ Your honor,” and Captain Roderick turned to the Judge, “ I think likely enough this gentleman owned the ‘ Screamer ’ at one time; in fact,

I know that she was built for a man named Williams — the builder's books show it; but he hasn't got a ghost of a title to her now, and I'll tell you why.

"A year ago last June — and I guess it was pretty soon after the collision we have just heard about — this motor-boat was picked up abandoned in Massachusetts Bay by a T-Wharf fishing schooner. She was badly stove for'rard, and otherwise used up, and about half-full of water to boot. They patched her up temporarily and towed her into Boston, and had a hard time doing it — lost her twice in a blow, and spent a pile of time chasing after her — but she looked valuable to them, so they stuck to the job.

"They advertised her in the Boston papers, but never got any response; so, finally, to pay them for their trouble they turned her over to a Commissioner of Wrecks and libelled her for salvage. When their case came up no one appeared to defend the suit for the boat's owner, and the fishermen got judgment of several hundred dollars against the craft for their work. Nothing was heard from the owner even then, so, after the Commissioner had held the boat the length of time required by law — I believe it was a year — he advertised her, and sold her at public auction, and I bought her."

This, then, was the hidden chapter in the "Screamer's" history — this was the simple

explanation of a matter that had seemed very mysterious.

"And that's where I got my title to the boat, Mr. Williams," the Captain declared, somewhat dramatically flourishing a paper as he spoke; "and here's my bill of sale from the proper authorities."

"But where do I come in? I paid good money for that motor-boat," said Williams, turning appealingly to the Judge.

"I guess you had better consult the Commissioner of Wrecks," replied that person. "It seems you had a whole year in which to claim your property before she was sold, and certainly she was pretty well advertised."

"But I thought she had sunk," was the quick retort; "and under the circumstances there was no reason why I should either advertise for her myself or watch the papers for advertisements about her."

"And, besides," suddenly broke in Thompson, "away down there in Newfoundland you didn't see the Boston papers very often, did you? Rather lonesome, in fact, wasn't it, part of the time at least?"

At Thompson's unexpected query both Williams and Stuart turned their faces toward the speaker — faces from which the color had suddenly gone, though they still maintained their composure.

"What do you know about Newfoundland?" Williams managed to ask, after an instant's pause; and the Judge and everyone else but the Captain and Baldwin turned inquiringly toward Thompson.

"He was in Newfoundland, Judge," asserted that individual. "In fact, they were both of them there — that is, they divided their time between Newfoundland and the coast of Maine — for about a year. I wish you would ask them what they were doing there."

"Why — why —" stammered Williams, now actually startled out of his calmness, but quickly regaining his nerve; "we were there on a matter of personal business — and to see the country, too."

"Yes, I rather think you were," Thompson retorted, drily, "both you and Stuart. If you will permit me, Judge, I will say that we have evidence to show that the pair of them were down there in Newfoundland getting together parties of Chinamen which they were afterwards instrumental in smuggling into the United States down here on the coast of Maine."

A red flush slowly overspread Williams' face as Thompson made this serious charge against him. Hot words rose to his lips, but before he could utter them the other continued.

"And yesterday they both helped to bring into Penobscot Bay a party of Chinese on the

yacht 'Penelope,' and transshipped them to the fishing steamer 'Dorabelle' near Whale Island."

"It's a lie!" declared Williams and Stuart in loud unison, starting to their feet. Thompson and Baldwin also arose, and the latter stepped toward the door.

"Let me tell you something you don't seem to know," said Thompson, gravely regarding the pair, whose agitation was evident in every feature. "After you left the schooner last night, aground down near Whale Island, these young men whom you have had arrested on a false charge captured the 'Dorabelle' with her crew and her cargo of smuggled Chinese, and handed her over to the revenue cutter, which seized the schooner as well. Both vessels reached Stroudport this morning, the 'Penelope' in tow of the cutter."

"I admit being on the 'Penelope' last week," said Williams, "but there were no Chinese on her then, and I certainly know of no smuggling plot."

"Lying won't do you any good," was the terse reply. "Pike has confessed and we know everything. We are United States officers, and you can both consider yourselves under arrest."

Instantly the eyes of the two smugglers turned toward the door as if they meditated a break for liberty; but they saw the bulky form of Baldwin barring the way. Scowling, they sank back into their seats. Their career of lawlessness, which had

held out alluring promises of easily gotten money, had been abruptly checked, as it deserved to be, and it was no wonder they now felt glum with prison staring them in the face.

After the excitement occasioned by this arrest had quieted down the Judge proceeded to dispose of the case against the four boys, and he did it in very short order; for he simply affirmed it as his opinion that in view of the evidence submitted Val had a clear title to the "Screamer," and discharged them from the custody of his court as innocent of the charge on which they had been arrested.

The officers then departed with their prisoners; but the boys and Captain Roderick lingered to shake hands with the Judge, and to thank him for cutting legal red tape and disposing of their case so promptly.

"Just for curiosity I would like to know what those fellows were doing in Massachusetts Bay with that motor-boat when they were run down," remarked the man of the law, as the group spent a few moments in discussion of the case. "It is safe to say, at any rate, that it was something unlawful; for it does not appear that when the party rowed ashore from the supposedly sinking boat they reported their mishap to any one; for if news of the accident had become public there would have been no difficulty on the part of the fishermen in tracing the owner of the 'Screamer' "

when they brought her into Boston — or so at least it looks to me.

“ But as for you young men,” he added genially; “ as soon as Inspector Thompson told me of the brave way you tackled that steamer last night to help out Uncle Sam, I made up my mind you weren’t in the boat-stealing business. I am sure the facts bear me out. Good-bye.”

Jubilation reigned on board the “ Screamer ” when, after saying good-bye to the Captain as he left them to take the train back to Stroudport, the boys started for camp. Their enemies had been routed, and they had well earned the five hundred dollar reward while doing it. Now, at last, it seemed that the search for the tilting rock might go on without interruption, and as the motor-boat glided smoothly down the bay they laid further plans for finding the treasure.

When they sighted the cove Jim suddenly remembered the lobster pot; so they ran out to the float, picked up the line and hoisted the pot on board. Everybody gazed eagerly as it came dripping out of the water.

“ I can count a dozen,” Jim announced, with his eyes close to the slats. “ Twelve, by gum! and they’re all busters! ”

“ Then this is where I fill up,” declared Sumner, “ for I never yet had all the lobster I wanted at one time.”

They found the camp undisturbed; and the

first thing they did was to build a roaring fire in the fire-place, set on the biggest kettle, and boil the entire catch. When they had finished supper they all had eaten lobster till they could hardly breathe.

Jim set his burglar alarm that night, but nothing came to disturb their slumbers. Right after sunrise the next morning they hustled down for their morning exercise and plunge; breakfast followed in short order, and then all embarked on the "Screamer," and out of the cove they went, heading northward till they reached the former location of the cross. They had brought all the paraphernalia used the day before, and a lantern besides; but for the present they hurried up the hillside over the line already laid out, for no one felt that it had been carried to a finish.

"And I'll just bet you anything you want to say there'll be something doing around that old house," was Sumner's positive declaration.

"There are two places about it that we haven't explored yet," agreed Carroll; "the cellar and the garret."

When at last they came in sight of the dilapidated structure it looked much less dismal in the bright sunlight than it had in the fog of the day before. Jim Hilton, to whom this was all new country, ran ahead and stood on the doorstep.

"Is it nine hundred and fifty feet to here, boys?" he inquired. "Then, by gum, the tilting rock must be in the cellar." He pushed the door open and went in, followed impetuously by the others.

Sumner lighted the lantern and led the way down a flight of rickety stairs to the cellar. They found it to be a regular dungeon of a place, into which little light came except that afforded by the lantern. Windowless stone walls enclosed it, and in the centre stood the base of the huge chimney, occupying a space about ten feet square. The cellar floor was dirt, and the atmosphere was heavy with a damp, musty odor.

"There is no tilting rock here," commented Sumner in a disappointed tone. "Let's go on 'round the chimney, for maybe it's on the other side." And he led the way around to the right followed by Val and Carroll; but Jim, who had already of his own accord started to the left, kept on in that direction alone, for the lantern somewhat dispelled the darkness ahead of him, though it was on the other side of the cellar.

The others did not notice that Jim had left them, and they had advanced but a few feet when they heard him utter an exclamation of alarm.

"Come quick, fellows!" he cried. "I'm falling through!" Then followed a scratching and scraping, and the muffled sound of a fall.

Instantly Val, Cal, and Sumner ran around

the chimney; but when Sumner flashed the lantern about in the space where they supposed Jim to be, there was nothing there but the empty cellar.

CHAPTER XXI

AT THE END OF THE SEARCH

To say that the sudden disappearance of Jim Hilton created a sensation among his companions is to state the truth in a very mild way. Greatly alarmed and mystified by the strange happening, Val, Cal and Sum advanced slowly into that part of the cellar that Jim had so lately entered, calling his name again and again as they did so.

And then, to their amazement, from the very ground at their feet came the muffled tones of Jim's voice calling for aid. Their eyes instantly turned downward, and they discovered something they had not before noticed. Set in the ground close to the chimney, in a sort of casing of masonry, its upper side level with the cellar bottom, was a smooth slab of stone, about eight feet long and close to four feet wide. Somewhere underneath this stone was Jim, for his agitated voice came up muffled through the cracks between the slab and its casing.

"I'll be jiggered," began Val. "Jim," he loudly called, kneeling and placing his lips near

the edge of the stone, "what on earth happened to you?"

"That big stone tipped down at one end and let me down into a hole," was the reply. "Heavens, I thought you would never answer me; for it tipped back again and shut me down here."

"Are you hurt, old man?" Cal demanded.

"No, but it's darker'n Egypt. Just tip that stone down again, won't you, and let me out?"

"You bet we will!" said Val, and they proceeded to jounce on first one end of the slab and then on the other, but in spite of all their efforts it refused to tip down as Jim said it had done before.

"I guess we can do better business by prying it up with the crowbar," said Sumner, at length.

"It's no use, Jim," he continued, speaking into the crack. "We can't tip it. How far'd you drop, and can you touch the stone?"

Jim couldn't touch the stone, and thought he must have dropped about ten feet straight down. He had landed uninjured on a soft bottom, but there were stone walls on three sides of the well-like hole he was in, while on the fourth he could feel an opening — possibly a passage leading off.

"I haven't got a single match, fellows," he complained, "and it's simply rotten dark and horribly musty here. For goodness' sake hurry

up and start that stone somehow, and get me out."

"We *are* hurrying, old man," protested Sumner, as he seized the crowbar and tried to force its point into the crack at the edge of the slab. "But I'll bet you anything you want to name that this is the tilting rock, and I wish you'd feel round and see if there isn't some treasure down there. Say, don't you see anything of the treasure, Jim?" he continued, after several ineffectual attempts to insert the bar.

But this query was too much for Jim, immured in the pitch darkness of the hole and nervously awaiting release.

"Treasure!" he snorted, indignantly. "What do you think I am? A lightning bug? See if you can't squeeze some matches down to me so I can look around. All I can see is a little glimmer in the cracks overhead."

Thereupon Carroll tucked a match down into the crack, and after a little fumbling Jim found and lighted it.

"It's like a well, built square, without any water," he presently reported, "only there's a tunnel running out of it on one side."

"Do you see any treasure chest?" again asked Sumner, who had stopped trying to pry up the stone and placed his ear to the crack. "Why don't you explore the tunnel? Maybe it's in there."

“ Maybe it is; but how much exploring do you imagine I can do with one match? ” growled back Jim, as he burned his fingers. “ You don’t think I’m anxious to wander off in the dark and fall down another hole, do you? ”

This query silenced Sumner, and he resumed his efforts with the bar, though he could not seem to get the point far enough into the crack to obtain any leverage, for the stone fitted its casing quite closely. Carroll proceeded to poke the entire supply of matches — barely a dozen — down to Jim one at a time; but Val’s attention was suddenly attracted by a group of marks on the stone. He moved the lantern over for a closer inspection and, to his astonishment, discovered cut in the surface of the slab near the back several lines of characters similar to those of the two ciphers. In exultation he showed them to his companions.

“ I’ll bet if we can translate them it’ll tell us how to move the rock,” he declared with conviction.

“ And probably say where the treasure is, too,” added Sumner. “ Here, fellows; I’ve got the old tally paper to set ’em down on. Let’s get busy translating or I shall bu’st! ”

The boys were pretty well wrought up before by the strange accident to Jim, but this latest discovery simply put them on the keen edge of excitement. As for Jim, nothing had been heard from that individual since he got hold of more

matches. They now called to him repeatedly, but without response.

"I'll bet he's gone exploring that tunnel," said Sumner, rather wistfully. "Come on; let's get to work!"

"Then here goes," said Val, as he proceeded to blow away the dust and dirt that clung to the lines of the mysterious characters. "Now, let's see; shall we let each line to the left count one, each line to the right three, and each short vertical line count five? That's the combination that solved the Tower Island cipher, and we might as well start this with it, I think."

And that is what they did. Down in the dusk of that ancient cellar, with only a flickering lantern for light, the three boys bent low over the slab and worked earnestly to extract the meaning from the odd characters that someone, many years before, had cut in the stone. Taking the values suggested, the first character totalled twenty-one, which represented "U." Then followed in rapid succession "N," "D," "E," and "R."

"Under," announced Sumner, who was setting down the letters. "Lordy, but we're hot on the trail, all right."

A few minutes more of rapid work completed a sentence. It came, of course, with the words jumbled together, but after a little thought it was arranged as follows:

"Under this rock lies treasure."

"What did I tell you, fellows!" almost shouted Sumner, in his unbounded enthusiasm executing a sort of a jig that threatened to upset the lantern. "What did I tell you?"

"Keep quiet, will you, kid!" remonstrated Carroll, with simulated impatience, though his own voice broke with excitement. "There's a lot more to it. Come back here and let's finish this thing."

But Sumner knelt and placed his lips to the crack at the edge of the slab.

"Jim!" he loudly called. "Jim! There's treasure down there! Look out for it!"

Up to this moment the imprisoned member of the party had maintained the silence that followed his receipt of the second supply of matches; but now his voice replied eagerly to Sumner's.

"I've found it, boys!" was his surprising declaration. "It's down here — I've found it!"

"What have you found?" asked Val.

"A chest, and it rattles as if there was money inside of it!" was the quick reply. "Brace up and open that trap door, for I've found the treasure, sure!"

It was a very energetic trio that now hustled along the translation of the cipher; but it was done at last, and when they had divided it into words, here is what they found:

"Under this rock lies treasure. Let him who finds make no foolish use lest evil come from

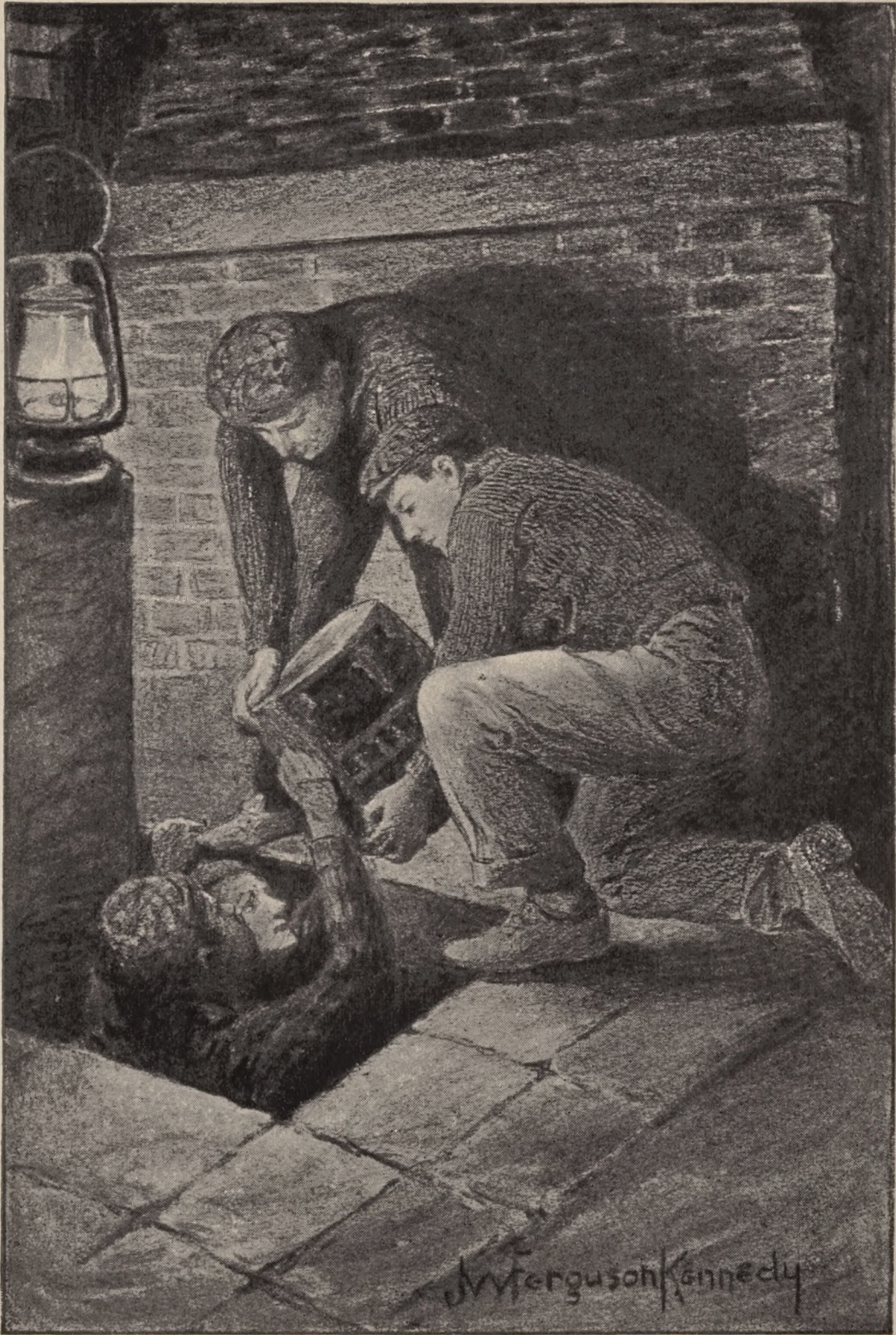
treasure gotten by ill means. Press iron knob on chimney and push down rock at right."

That was all, but you can well imagine that by this time the boys scarcely knew whether they were on their heads or their feet. Val held the lantern over near the chimney, and, sure enough, there was an iron knob projecting from the stonework about four feet from the ground.

"I'll push this in," he said, placing his hand on the projection, "and when I do so, you two step gently on the right-hand end of the slab. Don't step too hard, for you might be swallowed up, too. Look out, Jim," he cautioned that person. "We're going to try and open your trap door."

The knob was pushed in with some effort, but no sooner had this been done than the slab yielded under the pressure of Cal and Sum's feet, and the right end tipped down, swinging apparently on an axle that passed through it crosswise, about midway of its length. As the right end tipped down, the left of course tipped up, till at last the slab stood on end, a trifle less than half of it being below and a trifle more than half above the cellar floor, while the walled-up hole into which Jim had fallen yawned at their feet.

"Jim must have pushed in that knob when he came around here in the dark," said Carroll, as, after bracing the slab in a vertical position with the bar, they peered down into the opening. "Then he stepped on the right end of the stone, and it



“IT WAS CERTAINLY A TUG GETTING THAT HEAVY CHEST UP
FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE HOLE.”

let him through before he could help himself. The stone being heavier on the other end it tipped back and closed the hole as soon as he had gone through. There must be some kind of a latch that catches it on the under side." And investigation proved this to be the case, the latch being operated by the knob, and snapping automatically into position when the slab swung to a horizontal position.

"Jim!" called Val, anxiously. "Where are you, Jim?"

Jim was not visible at the bottom of the hole, which the lantern illuminated dimly. To their wonder the air of the shaft was laden with the odor of burning pitch; but this was explained in another moment, for as they eagerly called for Jim, that person appeared in the passageway that led out of the pit to the right. In one hand he held a blazing pitch-pine torch, that cast an uneven flare around on the rough stones; with his other hand he was tugging something that looked like a box.

"Here's the chest, boys!" he cried, exultantly, turning an excited face up toward his mates, and coughing a little from the smoke. "I found it up at the end of this tunnel, along with a bundle of pine knots. Help me get it out of here, will you?"

Would they help him? Well, wasn't that what they were there for? But it was certainly a tug

getting that heavy chest up from the bottom of the hole. It was not a large chest, as chests go, but it was made of stout oak, bound with heavy bands of wrought iron, and fastened with a large lock of ancient pattern; while from its interior came the rattle and clink of the metal which added greatly to the weight of the whole.

But when you have thought of treasure and talked of treasure for a whole year, and at last find it in your grasp, and not the figment of a dream or the vision of your imagination, the excitement of the moment is apt to brace up your muscles a little. Val lowered himself into the hole — there were no steps, but the uneven edges of the stones in the wall afforded a good foothold — and between them he and Jim got the chest on their shoulders and then above their heads; and then Carroll and Sumner reached down and grasped it from overhead, and lifted it up to the cellar floor. Jim then climbed out, but Val, Cal, and Sumner had to take a look at the tunnel where the treasure had been discovered. It was not much to see — only a narrow passage about thirty feet long, running out under the back of the house, and terminating against a rough mass of dirt and rocks that looked very much as if the tunnel had once extended farther, but had caved in. So they didn't spend many moments in that gloomy region, but soon rejoined Jim in the cellar. The slab was then allowed to

fall back to a horizontal position, and they carried the chest and their belongings up-stairs and out of doors.

"Shall we open it here, or wait till we get to the 'Screamer'?" asked Sumner, inspecting the curious old chest with delighted eyes.

"We can soon break in with the crowbar," replied Jim; and, suiting the action to the word, he inserted the end of the bar near the fastening, pried vigorously, and the rusty metal parted with a loud snap. Val pulled the cover open, and there to their eager eyes was revealed the treasure of Whale Island. Coins of dull gold, and silver coins black with tarnish, filled the chest even full with its top. They grasped them by the handful and examined them wonderingly.

"Pieces of eight — doubloons!" murmured Sumner, diving his hands deeply into the chest and letting the coins run through his fingers. "Lordy, fellows, this can't be true. Pinch me, and see if I'm not asleep, for I bet I'll wake up in a minute!"

"Nothing but gold and silver," remarked Jim, presently, after they had gloated awhile over their discovery. "There isn't a single jewel in the bunch, nor — nor an ingot."

"What an ungrateful sinner you are," laughed Val, happily. "But what's this?" and as he spoke he pulled from among the coins a small box of tarnished silver. Unfastening the diminutive

clasp that secured its hinged cover, he opened it, and there gleaming and glistening under the rays of the forenoon sun lay a little heap of the handsomest unset diamonds they had ever seen.

"Here's the jewels, Jim," cried Carroll, leaning over Val's shoulder to look. "Aren't they corkers, though! But as for the ingots, I guess we will have to pass them up till we find another treasure. Try to bear up under the disappointment, old man!"

They never knew exactly how they got that chest down to the "Screamer," along with their other traps. They seemed to be in a sort of daze, or a dream from which they might at any minute be rudely awakened. However, after a fashion they *did* succeed in getting back to camp, and on the way they emptied the contents of the chest on the cockpit floor and sorted the gold coins from the silver. They were jubilant to find that the gold were largely in the majority. As nearly as they could estimate there were about seventy-five pounds of them, and perhaps forty of the silver. There were just thirty-five diamonds. As they had no scales of any kind, the estimating of weight was altogether guess-work; but they came to the conclusion that there might be about twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of the gold coins, and maybe five hundred dollars' worth of the silver. The coins were very curious, and unlike anything they had ever seen. Both

gold and silver were of foreign mintage, dated back in the eighteenth century, and bore inscriptions in a language that none of them could read, though Carroll declared it to be Spanish.

"Treasure from the Spanish main, boys," he asserted, strongly. "Ill-gotten gains looted from some old merchantman, I'll bet; but we will never know," he added, regretfully, "just where it came from, nor how it happened to be buried under that old house, for there wasn't a scrap to tell us anything about it except that it was ill-gotten."

However, his companions thought they could stand the strain of not knowing so long as the chest and its contents were a very tangible reality.

The instant they landed at the camp they worked with might and main to get everything on board of the "Screamer." "Ho for Stroudport!" was the unanimous cry. No one cared to stay an instant longer on Whale Island. Each wanted to get that treasure back to civilization and find out how much it amounted to. Nobody asked for dinner — no one could talk of much except treasure.

In just one half-hour from the time they returned from the old house they had taken down the tent, and stowed it on the motor-boat with all their other effects, filled the water tank with fresh water from the brook, hoisted the tender on board, and started for home. That was about

noon. The "Screamer" reeled off the miles back to Stroudport without a hitch, and at seven o'clock that evening ran in at the yacht-club, and the momentous trip to Whale Island was ended.

My story is about told, and I will not weary you with the details of how they disposed of the treasure so that it netted them to the best advantage, except to say that a large number of the coins were sold to collectors for sums far above their face value, and the amount realized from them all was about thirty thousand dollars. In addition to this, the diamonds brought nearly twenty thousand dollars additional, which, with the five hundred dollars' reward for capturing the smugglers that was eventually paid to them, made the total amount realized as the result of their trip just about fifty thousand dollars.

Later in the fall all of the boys were called upon to testify in court against the smugglers; and the latter — Captain Field, Pike, alias Fenderson, who had yielded too easily to temptation, Sanders, Hixon, Heffler, Dan Newton Williams, and Stuart, were convicted of smuggling, and sentenced to various terms in state's prison. The po'gy steamer "Dorabelle" and the schooner-yacht "Penelope" were confiscated by the government, condemned, and sold at auction. The downfall of the smuggling scheme was complete.

There were two questions, however, which

troubled the boys from the very first after the treasure was found. The first was: to what share was Professor Strodder entitled? and the second: was the owner of Whale Island entitled to a share? These two questions formed the basis of many an earnest argument. Each wanted to do the right thing, but no two could seem to agree on the same course.

At last they hit upon an idea. They would write Professor Strodder — who, it will be remembered, had dreamed the dream that led to the finding of the Stone Horse Island cipher — and to Charles Vinal, who was the real owner of Whale Island, and tell them what had happened, and ask each what share he thought he ought to have. After some delay the address of the Professor was obtained from Mr. Padgett of Codville, with whom he had boarded the previous summer, and that of Mr. Vinal was secured from Manager Killen of the Blue Hill Granite Company. It was some time before an answer came from Mr. Vinal, for he was absent in Europe, but a reply came from the Professor quickly enough, from a little town in Massachusetts. It said:

“MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS:— Accept my heartfelt congratulations on the successful outcome of your strenuous search for treasure. Although I was unwittingly the means of helping to find one of the two ciphers of which you speak,

yet as I have borne none of the hardships of the search I scarcely feel that I am entitled to share in the reward.

“However, since you seem to feel that something may be due me I will state that I am engaged in the propagation of a parasitic insect that is bound to be the means of exterminating not only the gypsy moth but also the brown-tail moth, both of which are working such havoc among the trees of New England, and even beyond.

“If you feel kindly disposed toward your old friend, send me five hundred dollars to help out the good work of propagation, and you will earn the heartfelt gratitude of hundreds of thousands of people who are suffering from the ravages of these pestiferous insects.

“Yours truly,

“J. LOWTON STRODDER.”

“Five hundred dollars — a mere bagatelle!” sniffed Jim, loftily.

“Well, then, let’s send him an even thousand, and earn twice as much gratitude from those bug-ridden folks,” suggested Sumner.

Val and Carroll concurred in this, and a check for a thousand dollars was eventually sent to the Professor.

The communication which came at last from the owner of Whale Island was read with great interest. Val had written the letter to Mr. Vinal,

giving a full description of the ciphers, the way they had discovered their meaning, and an outline of the tribulations passed through in the search. So the reply was addressed to Val, and ran as follows:

“MY DEAR SIR: — I was very much interested in your letter, and to know that at last someone had discovered the significance of that old iron cross that stood during my boyhood on the eastern shore of Whale Island. The stone slab in the cellar of the old house I distinctly remember seeing at one time, when as a boy I explored the ancient structure with some friends — without however having the slightest idea that it might cover hidden treasure.

“You ask me what portion of the treasure I think you ought to give me. My dear young man, my father left me so large a fortune when he died that I have found difficulty ever since in disposing of the income, and under those circumstances I see no reason why you should give me anything simply because you found it on land that belongs to me. Neither I, nor, so far as I know, any of my ancestry, had anything to do with placing it there, and since its discovery was due solely to the pluck and ingenuity of yourself and your companions, I certainly think you should keep it all.

“Sincerely yours,

“CHARLES VINAL.”

This letter determined the disposition of the treasure. After sending one thousand dollars to the Professor there would be left about forty-nine thousand dollars. Just divide this amount by four and you will find out what each of the boys received as his share.

While this correspondence was progressing and the disposal of the treasure being made, Jim Hilton — who was supposed to be boarding at Harpsboro with his sister — was spending most of his time in and around Stroudport with one or another, or all three, of his friends. It was late in the afternoon of one of those days in July that the "Screamer," with the four on board, was speeding swiftly toward the city from the direction of Harpsboro, where they had just landed Mr. and Mrs. Manning, Dorothy and Grace, Madge Hilton and her cousin Vic Whitcomb, after a day's trip to Biddeford Pool and up the Saco River.

"What are you going to do with all your money, boys?" suddenly inquired Jim, rousing from the quiet mood that had overtaken him.

"Let him who finds make no foolish use lest evil come from treasure gotten by ill means," quoted Sumner, in a subdued tone. "What are you going to do with yours, Val?"

"Going to put part of mine into a partnership with Mr. Culberson in the life insurance business," was the reply.

“ How about you, Cal? ”

“ Oh, I’ll invest it in good securities, and use the income to pay my college expenses, instead of letting Dad pay ’em all. After I’m through college I’ll study law; then I’ll run for Congress, and after that you’ll see me landed in the White House; and the crest on my stationery will be a triangle with a tower, a whale, and a horse at the corners.”

They all laughed at this sally; but Jim sobered as he remarked:

“ I’ll finish high school this year, and then I’m going to study electricity at ‘ Tech,’ and specialize on telephone engineering — ”

“ And about the time that Cal lands in Washington we’ll get a long-distance message that you’ve got Edison done to a finish,” Val broke in. “ But what is our little Sumner going to do with all his hard cash? ”

What Sumner at that particular moment may have decided to do will never be known — he has changed his mind several times since, which may be excused in a youth of his age — for just as the “ Screamer ” turned the buoy on Brimstone Point Ledge and headed fair for Stroudport harbor, a motor-boat that for some minutes had been working down toward them from the direction of the Foreside ranged alongside. It was the “ Ginger,” with Rad, Alf, and a party of ladies aboard.

There was a toot of defiance from the "Ginger," to which the "Screamer" unhesitatingly responded, and the race was on. Nip and tuck, tooth and nail, taking no chances, and coddling the engines as though they were sick babies, they coaxed and cajoled the two boats to show their top speed. In past Fort Gorges, past schooners and barges and tramp steamers at anchor, past bay steamers outbound filled with crowds for the island theatre, on they drove, first one and then the other gaining a temporary advantage; but at the last, as on the morning at Harpsboro, the "Screamer" proved herself the faster, and came in at the yacht-club landing a clean winner.

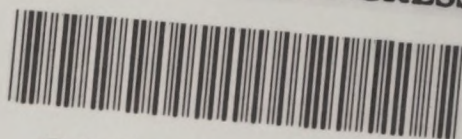
"Well, I just guess he didn't catch us with our engine all gummed up that time," cried Sumner happily, as they bumped the float. And, after making all snug, they went off up the wharf, four abreast and arm in arm, joyously singing:

"There are no flies on us,
There are no flies on us,
No flies on us.
There may be one or two
Great big fat flies on you;
There are no flies on us,
No flies on us!"

THE END.

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